THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

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The Place of Prayer in the Christian Religion

BY
JAMES M. CAMPBELL

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TO MY BROTHER IN THE SPIRIT, THE REV. HUGH C. WADDELL, DIRECTOR OF THE LOS ANGELES EVANGELICAL PRAYER UNION, WHO, MORE THAN ANY PERSON I HAVE EVER KNOWN, HAS GIVEN HIMSELF UP TO THE PROMOTION AND MINISTRY OF PRAYER.

O Thou that hearest prayer,
Unto thee shall all flesh come.

—*Psa. 65. 2.*

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INTRODUCTORY

DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS IN CHRISTIAN PRAYER

The instinct to pray is ineradicable. Men everywhere pray. They pray before they are taught. They pray because they must. They can no more help praying than they can help breathing. They often pray blindly and uncertainly, but they keep on praying. The way in which they pray indicates the measure of their religious development. Indeed, a history of prayer would be a history of the religious life of mankind.

In Christianity prayer has reached its highest water mark. The amazed onlookers who said of the earlier followers of Jesus, "Behold how these Christians love," might with equal propriety have said, "Behold how these Christians pray." No other worshipers ever prayed after such a fashion. They may have prayed as earnestly, but not as understandingly; they may have gained as great a nearness to God in prayer, but not as comforting a vision of his presence; they may have taken as firm a grip upon God, but could not have possessed as clear a sense of the ground of their overcoming faith. To Christian prayer belongs something of the fullness, the largeness, and the richness which belong to the Christian life of which it is a part.

It contains certain distinctive elements not elsewhere to be found. In vain we search the sacred books of the great religions of the world for such a view of prayer as that presented in the pages of the New Testament. The view there given stands absolutely alone.

Among the characteristic elements in New Testament prayer are the following:

1. *A New Conception of the One to Whom Prayer Is Addressed.*

In the Old Testament God is represented as Creator, and the fundamental thing in prayer is creature dependence; in the New Testament God is represented as Father, and the fundamental thing in prayer is filial confidence. In giving to his disciples their first lesson in prayer, Jesus said, "When ye pray, say, Our Father." He made known to them the One to whom they were to pray as a Father loving and tender, with whom every man may hold personal relations, a Father who is ever accessible; who is responsive to every appeal of every child, and who, without having to be pressed or worried into compliance, stands ready to give him whatever he asks and needs as soon as he is prepared to receive it and use it.

2. *A New Way of Approach into the Divine Presence.*

That "new way" is Christ himself. "No one cometh unto the Father," he himself says, "but by

me" (John 14. 6). This new way of approach is said to be "in his name." The Christian is to pray in his name, inasmuch as through his completed sacrifice the kingdom of heaven has been opened to all believers. By praying in his name the disciple stands in his Master's place, and becomes so completely identified with him that what belongs to Christ he claims as his own.

3. *A New Aid in Prayer.*

In the struggle of his heart to rise heavenward, in his effort to utter the thoughts and feelings that stir within him, man is no longer alone. By his side, all unseen, stands an abiding Helper—even the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, in the sphere of whose enlightening influence his prayer is to be made, and in the sphere of whose upholding and directing power his prayer becomes effective.

4. *A New Conception of Prayer as a Thing of the Spirit.*

It is no longer identified with altars and shrines, but is so spiritualized and universalized that any spot on earth may be a holy temple where worshiping souls may hold communion with the unseen and immanent Father.

5. *A New View of Prayer as Something which Is Concerned More with Man's Higher than with His Lower Interests.*

Temporal things are not excluded from the range of prayer's objects, but with the true Christian they

are always made subordinate. In prayer, as in everything else, he fixes his supreme desires upon spiritual and eternal things. He seeks "first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." In the words of The Agrapa as quoted by Origen, "He asks great things, and little things are added; he asks heavenly things, and earthly things are added." By reversing this order, and standing on unchristian ground, shipwreck of faith in prayer has often taken place.

6. *A New Vision of the Scope of Prayer as Embracing All Sorts and Conditions of Men.*

This large vision, which Christianity alone gives, frees the praying soul from every vestige of narrowness, raises him above all distinctions of rank and race, and leads him in his supplication to engirdle the globe with a love and sympathy as broad as God's eternal purpose of grace. The man who does not pray in this catholic spirit for all sorts and conditions of men is not praying in a Christian fashion.

Much of the praying done within Christian circles is pre-Christian. It has Judaistic or pagan elements clinging to it. It is keyed too low; in its spirit and scope it falls below the Christian standard, and needs to be born again, that it may occupy the high place in the spiritual kingdom which belongs to Christianized prayer.

It is surely a great advantage to be living in the Christian dispensation, and to come into possession

of the spiritual inheritance which in "the fullness of the times" has come through Christ to the race. There are in Christian prayer heights of privilege and power to which we seldom rise. The place to which it leads us is the inner, and not the outer court of God's temple. It brings God near; it opens heaven; it brings within our reach the glorious riches of the spiritual universe.

To unfold the Christian view of prayer, as it is revealed in the New Testament and as it has been slowly developing in Christian consciousness and struggling for expression in Christian life, is the object for which the following pages have been written. And the hope is cherished that many who read them may not only be delivered from error upon this important subject but may be led to pray in a better way, with more winsome views of God; in a filial rather than in a legalistic spirit, with a clearer understanding of the laws which govern the answers to prayer, and with a firmer conviction of the practical value of prayer itself.

PART FIRST

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

CHAPTER I

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

JESUS, the founder of the Christian religion, was a man of prayer. Prayer formed the warp and woof of his daily life. It was the atmosphere in which he lived and moved and had his being. Perhaps no other feature of his many-sided life was more marked than its prayerfulness. He was always in the spirit of prayer. All the avenues of his soul were kept open toward heaven. Like the diver who goes down to the bottom of the sea, he kept his communication unbroken with the top, and was thereby enabled to live unharmed in the poisonous air of this lower sphere. His prayer-life was active as well as passive. The possession of the spirit of prayerfulness did not exalt him above the need of explicit acts of prayer. He was always lifting up his heart to God; he was often upon his knees pouring out his heart to God. As the greatest religious leader of all times Jesus furnishes the most shining example of the power of prayer. Never man prayed like this man. It is an open secret that his ideal life, the influence of which was, of all lives ever lived on this earth, the deepest, the widest, the sweetest, was rooted in a sense of dependence upon God, and was nourished by prayer.

In every respect save one, Jesus was our example in prayer—he never prayed for the forgiveness of sin. "He was holy, guileless, undefiled, and separated" not "from sinners" only, but also from saints. He had the loneliness of a mountain-peak experience. It is noteworthy that he never prayed with his disciples; and when the impulse seized them, as it must often have done, to kneel down beside him as he prayed, something held them back. They instinctively felt that a great gulf lay between him and them. In their consciousness of sin he did not share; hence he had no confession of it to make, and no forgiveness of it to ask. But he was in all points tempted like as they were; he had the same need of help, and the same source from which to draw it. His God was their God; his Father was their Father; his resources were those which were equally open to them. "Made like unto his brethren," partaking with them in all their generic experiences, he could and did enter into all human aspirations and longings of which prayer is the natural expression.

As the ideal man he walked in the common way of faith. He had perfect confidence in the Father; he believed in the rational order of the universe; he believed in the final outworking of the purpose of eternal love. Living a life of faith, he lived a life of prayer. Believing without ceasing, he prayed without ceasing. As "the leader and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12. 2) he became the leader and perfecter of our prayer-life. He taught us to pray,

and what to pray for; he trod the path of prayer before us; he prayed his way through difficulties otherwise impassable; and when his work on earth was accomplished he entered heaven with prayer.

CHAPTER II

THE ORDINARY LIFE OF JESUS WAS FULL OF PRAYER

PRAYER was its very soul and essence. It was the means by which its lofty aims reached fulfillment.

As revealing his prevailing habit we read such words as these: "In the morning, a great while before day, he rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed" (Mark 1. 35). "He withdrew himself in the deserts, and prayed" (Luke 5. 16). The word that in these instances is used for "prayer" denotes prayer in its more general and formal sense. It means, literally, the expression of one's wish. It implies something more than living in the atmosphere of prayer, waiting receptively upon God; it relates to special personal out-breathed desires, the active reaching up of the soul to God.

To secure uninterrupted converse with God, Jesus went apart from his disciples, apart from the people that thronged him, stealing away at early morn or at nightfall, seeking the solitude of some bleak mountain fastness. He accepted the isolation which is the lot of every praying soul. It was part of the price of spiritual leadership and power. But while alone he was not lonely. When most alone

he was least alone. When separated from his kind he was penetrated and interpenetrated with a sense of his Father's presence.

It was for his own sake, first of all, that he sought seclusion. He sought it that he might without interruption lift up the face of his spirit into the face of "the Father of spirits," "lay open all the depths of his being to the full and filling influx of the Father's mind and will and heart." He had need of inward renewal; he needed to recuperate his wasted energy after a day of exhaustive toil; and to prepare himself for the day that was about to dawn. His primal object in prayer was to get ready for action. Frugal as he was in the expenditure of his life-force, every part and particle of it being made to tell for the best results, he spent a great part of it in the exercise of prayer. The time thus employed was not lost. No part of his life counted for more.

And if Jesus, "The Holy One of God," felt the need of communion with God for inward renewal in the wear and tear of life, how much more urgent should be our sense of need? When drained of strength by the strain and stress of the day that is past, or when facing with shrinking of heart the task of the day that is coming, how eager should we be to tap, by prayer, the fountain of divine life and energy. The busiest among us ought not to grudge the time necessary for the refilling of the empty reservoir. As "a bird's wings add to the weight of the body, but when she learns to use

them they enable her to fly," so prayer, instead of hindering in the work of life, gives to it greater efficiency. The man who prays gets something into his life that the man who does not pray misses. He has meat to eat that the world knows not of. The man who stops to repair the broken buckle is the man who wins in life's race. The man who, alike in the parched weariness of the evening and in the dewy sweetness and freshness of the morning, turns aside for a while to nourish the life of his soul by communion with God is the man who in steadfastness of purpose holds on his way amid all difficulties and discouragements until he has finished the work that the Father has given him to do.

CHAPTER III

JESUS MET EVERY CRISIS IN HIS LIFE WITH PRAYER

In every emergency prayer was his unfailing resource. He never took any important step without consulting the Father; he never walked in an unknown way without taking hold of the Father's hand; he never faced any difficulty without imploring the Father's aid. Every new crisis in his life was a fresh call to prayer.

1. *He Began His Public Ministry with Prayer.*

"Now it came to pass . . . that, Jesus also having been baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3. 21, 22). Luke, who gives us "the kneeling Christ," adds to the picture of his baptism given by the other evangelists the significant touch that as Jesus stepped from the waters of baptism, he prayed. The words of his prayer are not recorded, but it is said that as he engaged in prayer three things took place:

(1) *"The heaven was opened,"* or, as Mark, in his energetic fashion, puts it, "was rent asunder." The parting of the lower skies was symbolical of

the opening to his vision of the higher spiritual realm. To this vision all his experience had led up; and in it all his preparation culminated. He had now come to spiritual maturity, and to the fullness of his Messianic consciousness. Heaven opened to his soul because his soul opened to heaven. He felt himself related to the upper sphere. His life was part of the infinite and the eternal. The vision which comes in some measure to every praying soul when the invisible world stands open and heaven and earth are seen to be inseparably united, had come to him in fullness.

(2) *"The Holy Spirit descended upon him" in bodily form as a dove.* The object of the Spirit's descent, and of his sensible contact, was doubtless to equip him for the work upon which he was entering, and the form which the Spirit assumed indicated the dovelike qualities of gentleness and purity with which he was to be endowed.

Whatever else his baptism signified, it was an act of supreme self-consecration; it was a sacrificial dedication of himself to his Messianic mission, not only in the way of fulfilling all ceremonial righteousness as an ideal Israelite, and all moral righteousness as an ideal man, but also in the way of fulfilling all righteousness as God's Anointed, who had accepted the task of bringing the world into possession of its spiritual inheritance. Conscious of the greatness of the undertaking, and of his need of divine assistance, he prayed for wisdom and strength. In answer to his prayer the Holy

Spirit descended upon him in fullness of power, as his abiding Helper; as he does upon every uplooking, consecrated soul.

(3) *"A voice came out of heaven."* Following the heavenly vision, and the heavenly enduement, came the heavenly voice, in which the Father acclaimed him as his well-beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased. It is worthy of note that it was his praying Son in whom the Father expressed his confidence, and upon whom he set the seal of his approbation. In the act of prayer itself he saw an evidence of fitness for the work of human redemption which the Son had undertaken. His elect in whom his soul delighted was a praying man who looked to him for help at every step in the way. With the attitude of prayerful dependence he is forever well pleased.

The lesson which here shines out is that the right way to begin an undertaking is by prayer. When so begun, when any son of God standing upon life's threshold girding himself for his appointed task lifts his heart in prayer, the heaven above will open to him; the Spirit in all the plenitude of his power will descend upon him, equipping him for his work; and the Father will, in some definite way, acknowledge him as one in whom he is well pleased.

2. He Prayed Before the Choosing of the Twelve.

"It came to pass in these days, that he went out into the mountain to pray; and he continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke 6. 12). Literally, it

reads that "He continued all night in the prayer of God." This is an expression not found elsewhere. What it means is that his prayer had its origin and its end in God. It was divinely inspired and divinely guided.

The specific object of his night-long prayer we learn from the context. After his vigil was over, "in the morning, when it was day, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles." It was with Jesus a time of great anxiety. He needed light so as to choose wisely the leaders of his church. He knew how much hung upon the selection which had to be made. How was he to judge aright touching the potentialities which lay concealed in the members of his little band of disciples? Could he trust his own unaided wisdom in deciding who among them should be his standard bearers? In his perplexity he did what all true souls have ever done—he prayed for light and leading. He hied away to the mountain-side, probably to the twin peaks known as "the horns of Hattin," that in the solitude of nature he might be alone with God and, free from distraction, hearken to his voice. As he waited in the presence of the Father, thinking of the choice that had to be made on the morrow, one by one his disciples passed in review before his mental vision; he weighed their merits, balanced their qualifications, singled them out, until he knew unerringly the place for which each one was fitted in the work of his Kingdom.

The word here used to denote the act of prayer literally signifies the outpouring of the soul before God. Jesus continued all night pouring out his soul in a stream of holy desire. The flight of time was forgotten in his absorption of thought, and in the delight he experienced in communion with the Father. He did not shorten prayer, having as Matthew Henry remarks, "a great deal of business at the throne of grace." He waited until the answer came, until he read his Father's mind and got his point of view. He had gone up the mountain at midnight with a perplexed and uncertain mind, he came down in the morning with every vestige of perplexity and hesitancy cleared away. He was sure of himself because he was sure of God.

In the life of every Christian similar periods of protracted prayer will occasionally be called for; times when prayer cannot be shortened. And it will always be found that those who can safely shorten prayer are those who on the great occasions have learned to continue long in prayer. The story is often told of Bengel, the commentator, how that at the close of a busy day he was overheard to pray, "Lord Jesus, it is just the same as ever between thee and me." That was all, but behind that brief prayer lay long periods of intimate fellowship; and it was in those protracted seasons of fellowship that the intimate friendship was formed, which allowed so much to be taken for granted. There are times when we must remain long on the mountain of prayer, and wrestle with some great

difficulty which we are powerless to overcome; times when the skein of life has become so hopelessly tangled that there is nothing left but to put it into the hands of the All-Father and patiently wait until he unravels it. When direction is sought we must continue in prayer until the light breaks and everything is made plain. After a night of waiting in holy confidence upon God, light cometh in the morning, the skies clear, questioning ends, doubts vanish, and the divinely guided soul walks with firm and certain step in the path where before his feet had stumbled.

3. *He Prayed for Strength to Overcome the Subtle Dangers of Success.*

"After he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain apart to pray: and when even was come, he was there alone" (Matt. 14. 23). It was the hour of his greatest popularity. Electrified by the display of his wonder-working power, the people wished to take him by force and make him a king. They caught him at a moment of weakness. Although possessed of kingly rights, he was destitute of kingly prerogatives. Of the insignia of royalty had he none. Why should he not accept the homage of the people and enter at once into his inheritance? Why should he not declare himself the rightful heir of the throne of his father David? The temptation was real and strong: and Jesus fled from it, and took refuge in prayer.

In this struggle the temptation of the wilderness

was renewed. The kingdoms of the world and the glory of them were again offered him if he would take a lower path, and renounce the sovereignty of the soul for the sovereignty of earthly pomp and power. To make himself secure against the peril of treading the path of worldly glory, and of seeking to find a shorter and easier way to reach his goal than the way of the cross, he prayed. He saw his danger, and he knew only one way to escape it.

Many there be who pray for strength in the day of adversity, but how few feel their need to pray for strength in the day of prosperity. And yet success is often more dangerous than failure. The sun of prosperity is often more destructive than the frosts of adversity. The dangers of success are dreaded by few. Most people are willing to take all the risks involved in success; and are not willing to have outward and temporary success denied them, that their lives may be saved unto higher ends.

Perhaps no form of success is more dangerous and less dreaded than that which is accompanied by popular favor. The slightest taste of popularity often intoxicates the strongest minds. Those who remain untouched by the vulgar lust for wealth are carried away by the more refined love of power. How subtle its temptations! how plausible the pretexts of those who covet it! It is seldom professedly sought for its own sake, but, rather, for the good that it can accomplish. When it is won how often does it corrode and consume the finer ele-

ments of character! Its insidious allurements have to be carefully guarded against; and when they have to be "met and fought with outright" they can be overcome only by the soul that comes forth from the place of secret communion panoplied with the strength of God.

4. *He Prayed Before Giving to His Disciples the Full Disclosure of the Nature of His Messiahship.*

This crisis is thus described, "It came to pass, as he was praying apart, the disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Who do the multitudes say that I am? And they answering said, John the Baptist; but others say, Elijah; and others, that one of the old prophets is risen again. And he said unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Peter answering said, The Christ of God" (Luke 9. 18-20). While he prayed, his disciples, restrained by mingled feelings of respect and awe, kept at a distance. When his prayer was ended he drew near. A moment pregnant with great issues had come. It was necessary that his disciples should have a clear conception of his Messianic claims; it was necessary also that they should be brought to a sharp and final decision regarding them. After prayer for guidance that he might meet the crisis by saying the right thing in the right way, he asked the fateful question, "Who say ye that I am?" Peter at once replies, "The Christ of God." This confession was the efflorescence of a

slowly maturing faith, the outbursting of the vision of divine glory which shone through the humanity of Jesus. Yet, noble as it was, it concealed the densest ignorance concerning the nature of his Messiahship. Peter was evidently thinking of the Messiah as a temporal prince who should restore the kingdom to Israel; and so when Jesus began to speak openly, and to undeceive him by telling him that the Messiah would be a suffering Saviour, he would have none of it. A Messiahship that involved a cross none of the disciples could understand. Perplexed, bewildered, disappointed, they still clung to the Master, but the gulf between him and them widened, and an estrangement followed which was perhaps the bitterest drop in his cup of agony.

Referring to this time of withdrawal, W. M. Clow rightly says that it has been "strangely neglected," and that "its momentousness as an epoch in his life, and the depth and significance of its teaching, have been overlooked"; but he is certainly wrong in characterizing it as a "quiet season of meditation." It was a time of agony; an earlier Gethsemane; and the significant thing is that for this severe ordeal he fortified his heart by prayer, so that when it came it found him prepared. Happy are those who have learned to meet life's crushing disappointments in the same way.

5. *He Was Transfigured in Prayer.*

In his account of the transfiguration Matthew states that Jesus took "Peter, and James, and John

his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: and he was transfigured before them" (17. 1). The account of Mark is similar. But Luke, who mentions in all six instances of Jesus in prayer, not recorded by the other evangelists, adds that he went up with his chosen disciples "into the mountain to pray"; and he states still further that it was "as he was praying the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became white and dazzling" (9. 28, 29). The praying of Jesus is the key to the interpretation of his transfiguration. It was while in close and continuous communion with the Father that the great change took place, which caused his countenance and his very raiment to shine with a splendor that dispelled the darkness of the night. So marvelous was the change which he underwent that the awe-struck disciples afterward tried in vain to find words adequate to describe it. "His garments," says Mark, "were glistening, exceeding white, so as no fuller on earth could whiten them." Matthew says, "his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light."

This display of outward glory was the out-raying of what was within. It was the momentary outflashing not only of what was absorbed in prayer but of his own divine, essential glory. When he was brought into immediate contact with heaven he was revealed as belonging to it. In his transfiguration the glory of his resurrection body was also prefigured; so that those who were eyewitnesses

of his humiliation, being also "eyewitnesses of his majesty," had all their doubts put forever at rest touching the triumph of his Messianic Kingdom.

In the saintliest lives there are transfiguration moments; moments when heaven and earth meet; moments when the divine glory breaks through its mortal concealments; moments when weakness and humiliation are swallowed up in the light of heaven's renewing and transforming grace. These are ever the moments of close and hallowed divine communion.

To get near the heavenly glory is to possess it. "Get close to the seller of perfume if you would be fragrant," says the Arabian proverb. Get close to God if you would have your poor, weak life lighted up with his glory. "Communion with God issues ever in a transfigured life," remarks Dr. G. Campbell Morgan. It makes the soul shine in the midst of darkness of this world with something of the brightness of heaven.

That the transfiguration of Jesus came before Gethsemane and Calvary, to prepare the disciples for them, has frequently been noted; but it has just as frequently been overlooked that it came after a period of loneliness and depression. Each of the three synoptists is careful to state that it took place about a week after the annunciation of his Messiahship. That week was a time of silence and of great soul-travail. The shadow of the cross flung itself across his pathway. One day of darkness followed

another. No relief came until he prostrated himself before God in prayer.

With most people it is by the *via dolorosa* that the mount of spiritual transfiguration is won. After days of darkness and depression the face of God is sought in prayer, and life is instantly changed. Over the praying soul heaven bends low; its glories encompass him; its grace transforms him; and as he descends to the valley he is enabled to meet in a new spirit the petty cares and arduous duties that await him. He may not be always able afterward to keep the heights which he has gained, but he will be the better for having gained them. The memory of these exalted moments may fade, but their influence will remain. Those who have been on the mount of transfiguration can never go back to the low levels which they occupied before.

6. *He Prayed in Gethsemane as He Entered His Final Passion.*

As the year of opposition, which followed the year of popularity, was drawing to its tragic close, he was driven to his knees oftener than before. The beginning of the final passion had come. The Paschal Supper was ended; the parting psalm was sung, and Jesus with his disciples went out into the night. They came to Gethsemane, "the garden of the oil press." At the entrance he parted from eight of the twelve, and taking the three who had been with him on the Mount went into the deeper shadows of the olive grove, saying to them, "Sit ye

here, while I pray" (Mark 14. 32). "And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him" (verse 35). "And again he went away, and prayed, saying the same words" (verse 39). In this hour of soul-travail Jesus was alone; as all men are in the profoundest experiences of life. His disciples could go with him only so far. Knowing their limitations, much as he yearned for their closer friendship and sympathy, he did not say to them, "Come with me and pray," but went himself apart to pray. And as they waited and watched in the light of the passover moon, and saw him kneeling, and heard him praying, they were the amazed witnesses of a grief they could not fathom, and in which they could not share. Like children beholding a mother's sorrow, when the stroke of bereavement falls, they could only look the sympathy they felt, conscious of its utter inadequacy to give the needed consolation.

As Jesus looked into the heart of his great passion he trembled at what he saw before him. He shrank from the cross. He was afraid that his frail humanity would give way, and that he would die with his work unfinished. His prayer, "Let this cup pass from me," was the cry of a soul recoiling from the ordeal that might prove too severe.

As his struggle deepened, the fervency of his prayer increased. "Being in agony he prayed more earnestly"; he did not pray himself into an agony; he prayed himself out of it. From emotional over-

strain aridity follows. We may pray our emotions out; we may open the sluice gates and empty the reservoir of feeling. Jesus held himself in restraint; he obtained victory over weakness. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, seeking to interpret this profound experience, speaks of him as our great High Priest, "Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, . . . became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation" (5. 7-9).

"Having been heard." What do those words mean? Not that the bitter cup passed, for it did not. It was drunk to the dregs. The answer came not in the withdrawal of the cup, but in receiving strength to drink it; not in the escape from death, but in securing through death the very object of his earthly mission. If we go deep enough, we find that the real object of his prayer was not that the cup might pass, but that it might pass *if that were possible*. Possible on the lower plane it certainly was; but on the higher plane it was not possible—if the Father was to be glorified, and the world redeemed. This inner truth Dr. George Matheson reaches when he says, "There was a desire in the depths of his heart which was expressed unconditionally: it was that his human will might be one with the divine will."

It is said that he was heard, "in that he feared." What he feared was not death but failure, through

the breakdown of his sacrificial work by his "choosing a different path from that which his Father had chosen for him." His struggle in the Garden was a struggle to keep up to the highest. His prayer was a prayer for strength. But he obtained the victory; so that his will was brought into perfect accord with the will of his Father, not in the sense of submitting to the inevitable, but in the sense of definitely choosing to hold to the supreme decision to go on. His was not a case of passive submission but of active self-surrender.

The help he sought and found in prayer may be ours also. We go to dark Gethsemane that we may learn of him to pray; and to prevail in prayer. His conflict and his victory are ours; the blessed fruits of his travail are ours.

> Into the woods my Master went,
> Clean forspent, forspent.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Out of the woods my Master went,
> And he was well content,
> Out of the woods my Master came
> Content with death and shame.

And where he went we may follow.

7. He Prayed on the Cross.

After uttering to the world the words of triumph and exultation, "It is finished," he turned his face to heaven and breathed out his soul in the prayer, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23. 46). In this prayer of commitment Jesus affords an example of a filial confidence that

remained unbroken to the end. He had walked the human way of faith; he had gone before the sons of men teaching them how to live the life of faith, and giving them a perfect example of a faith-filled life; he had gone into that way without flinching when it led to the cross, and now in the hour of final conflict, when he felt as if he had been forsaken of the Father, the anchor chain of faith did not snap. In the midst of the awful darkness of the cross he clung to the hand of the Great Unseen, saying, *"My God"*; and when the end of all came he dismissed his spirit, committing it, with serene confidence, into the hands of the heavenly Father, believing that in his keeping it would be eternally safe.

The words of his prayer were borrowed from an Old Testament writer who used them in reference to life rather than to death. In his deepest experiences Jesus did not hesitate to employ, and to adapt to his special need, a form of words that he found ready to hand. How surprised the unknown writer of these words would have been had he been told that such a use was to be made of them! Since then how many have taken this prayer into their lips; and in the solemn hour when time and eternity have met, and the ringing of the bells on the other shore has been heard, have sent their souls into the invisible in the calm and sweet assurance that their eternal welfare was secure, because their eternal all had been deposited in the hands of the heavenly Father?

CHAPTER IV

PRAYER AN INTEGRAL PART OF HIS REDEMPTIVE WORK

Jesus helped on the work of human redemption by prayer. Not alone by his teaching and example, not alone by his mighty deeds and sacrificial death did he affect for good the hearts and lives of men, but also by his prayers. His prayers were a distinct form of redemptive energy. They set in motion a stream of influence which still flows on unspent. This world is a different place from what it would have been had not Christ prayed in it and for it.

He prayed, as we have seen, in the first instance for himself, because he had need of divine help, and could not render effective service without it. But he prayed mainly for others. His prayers were as unselfish as the rest of his life. In them his passion for human weal was expressed. The world which he had come to save lay upon his heart, and his prayers on its behalf rose unceasingly. And inasmuch as its wants are so wide, and so diversified, his prayers, of necessity, took on a great variety of specialized forms.

1. *He Prayed for Little Children.*

"Then were there brought unto him little chil-

dren, that he should lay his hands on them, and pray" (Matt. 19. 13). This was probably his wont. The instinct that led these mothers of Israel to bring their children to Jesus that he might pray for them, invoking heaven's blessing upon them, was divinely implanted and divinely guided. They believed in his love for the children; and they believed that he was in such close touch with heaven that he could draw down blessing upon their heads. They never seemed to have questioned that to receive the touch of his hand and to secure an interest in his prayers was to obtain a substantial benefit. The way in which that benefit was conveyed they might not be able to understand, but the reality of it they never for a moment doubted.

The fact that he prayed for little children reveals his appreciation of their value. He saw the possibilities that lay hidden within them; he knew that the world's future would soon be in their hands, and he prayed that they might be molded and guided by a higher power, so that their lives might answer their destined ends.

Children are sometimes taught to look back regretfully upon this scene, and say, "I wish his hands had been placed on my head." Rather let them be taught that his hand is now placed upon the head of every one of them in blessing. His interest and love are unabated. He still prays for little children; and the fact that he does pray for them is one of the strongest motives that ought to lead us to pray for them also.

2. He Prayed for Individuals.

Of this we have an illustrative instance in his prayer for Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22. 31, 32). Peter was in danger, but he himself was unaware of it. His feet were slipping over the brink of a fearful precipice; and although, in his blindness, he felt no special need of prayer, the Master, who knew his danger, prayed for him. In answer to his prayer an unseen hand was holding him back from impending ruin. An unseen ally, who knew the designs of the ambushed enemy, and was able to foil them, was standing by his side ready to throw a protecting shield over his defenseless head. Satan begged to be allowed to subject him to some great temptation so as to sift the good out of him, that he might have him in his power and accomplish his destruction.

"I have prayed for thee"; literally, "I have besought for thee," says the Master, "that thy faith fail not." He did not pray that he might not be tempted, but that he might be given strength in the evil hour to withstand the assault of the tempter. The thing that Jesus was concerned about, the thing which he was afraid might fail, was Peter's *faith*. As the citadel of the religious life faith was the point of the enemy's attack. To lose faith is the greatest calamity that can overtake a soul. When faith fails the cable is broken that moors man to

the Eternal and he becomes a helpless derelict. That Peter did not lose his faith; that after his fall there came a sudden rebound, issuing in repentance and recovery, was doubtless due to the prayer of Jesus. The prayer of Jesus did not keep Peter from denying him, but it kept his faith from being utterly wrecked. So certain was Jesus that his prayer was heard that he antedates Peter's recovery, saying, "When once thou hast turned again, strengthen thy brethren." Jesus is concerned about the faith of every one of his tempted disciples, and when it is in danger of failing he makes supplication for him. He knows the struggle of each heart, the strength and subtilty of the temptations to which each one is exposed. His prayer is founded upon personal knowledge of each individual. He considers each one apart, takes up his case separately, names him in his prayer; and when he foresees temporary disaster awaiting him he does not pray that he may escape trial, but that his faith may not finally and totally fail, and that from momentary defeat may come permanent victory.

The help which the Master brings to the endangered disciples for whom he prays is well set forth in Bunyan's parable of a fire burning against a wall, and one standing nigh "pouring water on the flame, as though to quench it"; but the flame was kept burning, because on the back side of the wall there was "a man with a bottle of oil in his hand, out of which he constantly poured, sending the oil upon the flame." In this way Christ by his inter-

cession is constantly renewing his grace in our hearts.

3. *He Prayed for His Enemies.*

On the cross where he died to atone for sin he pleaded for the forgiveness of those who were putting him to death—especially for the soldiers who were executing the orders of their superiors, crying out, at the very time they were driving the nails into his hands and feet, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23. 34). This prayer for mercy upon his murderers, which was the first utterance from the cross, is like a flash of lightning on a dark night. It reveals a love without a limit, a love which includes not friends and neighbors only but also aliens and enemies, a love which no hell-fire of cruelty and hate could destroy, a love which awakens hope in the hearts of the guiltiest, for it warrants them in reasoning that if God's forgiveness could reach those who committed the darkest deed in human history, no sinner is beyond the pale of mercy. "Father, forgive them" means, "If *them,* then any and all." Between this prayer and the fearful imprecations contained in some of the Hebrew psalms there stretches a vast ethical development. It brings us into a totally different atmosphere.

One of the practical ends which this prayer of Jesus serves is that it furnishes an illustration, in his own conduct, of what is perhaps his hardest lesson. Some have even gone the length of affirm-

ing that when Jesus says, "Pray for them that despitefully use you" (Luke 6. 28), what he asks is not merely difficult, but impossible. To love an enemy, to wish him well, to do him good, to pray for him, that we may draw down blessing upon his unworthy head, is declared to be unnatural. So it is; but it is *Christian.* It goes against the grain of selfish, unrenewed human nature, but it is in harmony with the new Christian nature. To practice it is difficult, but not impossible. Indeed, it is a distinctive mark of a Christian; and no one has the right to claim the possession of the spirit of Christ, who, in looking over the list of his enemies, has not learned to substitute for the prayer of vengeance, "O Lord, consume them," the prayer of mercy, "Father, forgive them."

4. *He Prayed on Behalf of His Friends.*

When Martha and Mary of Bethany were in trouble they sought his aid. He was at a distance from Bethany when the report reached him that Lazarus the beloved was sick; but instead of hastening to the afflicted sisters "he abode where he was two days." While he tarried Lazarus died. When at length he reached the outskirts of the village Martha hurried out to meet him and exclaimed, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. And even now I know, that whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee" (John 11. 21). If before this time the faith of Martha had suffered a temporary eclipse, in the presence

of the Master it broke through every cloud, and in her heart the hope was born that her brother would be restored to life.

Coming to the grave, Jesus, in accordance with his custom of praying before performing a miracle, lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me" (verse 41), as if intimating that direct answer to prayer was a thing of habitual experience. And surely anyone whom God has always heard ought to have his faith conserved by the experience of the past, and be able to anticipate God, and not be afraid to speak with full assurance regarding the answer to any specific prayer, however difficult its fulfillment might appear to be.

5. *He Prayed for His Disciples.*

He prayed for them in every possible circumstance in which they needed divine help. He followed them at every step of the way with his loving thoughts, and enveloped them in his heaven-breathed desires. Yet there were particular and supreme things for which he specially prayed. Of these John mentions four.

(1) He prayed *that they might receive the Holy Spirit.* "I will pray the Father," he said, "and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever" (John 14. 16). The gift of the Holy Spirit was the promise of the new dispensation: by its bestowment the new dispensation was to be ushered in and perpetuated. For it the dis-

ciples were directed to wait and pray. With their prayer that of Jesus coincided. But when, at Pentecost, the prayer in which the disciples and the Master had joined was answered, and the Comforter had come never to depart, all prayer for it ceased. For why should prayer be continued for that which had come?

The prayer of Jesus for the Holy Spirit's bestowment thus takes its place among the list of prayers that have been answered. The Comforter has come; he is now at the side of every Christian—present to advocate his cause, present to help him in all his infirmities, present to befriend him in every way that is in his power.

And inasmuch as this prayer has been answered, all present prayer for the Holy Spirit must needs take on a new form. No longer is it a prayer for the Spirit's advent, but for the realization of his presence; no longer is it a prayer for his outpouring, but for his inpouring; no longer is it a prayer for his closer approach, but for his complete occupancy. Because the Holy Spirit has been given he can be received; and the heart's desire of every praying disciple should be that he may become more receptive to the fullness of his saving and sanctifying power.

(2) *That they might be united.* The great intercessory prayer of Jesus, which is the true Lord's Prayer, was offered in the presence of his disciples, just as they were about to break up and separate, at the close of the Paschal Supper. Its opening

words are: "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee" (John 17. 1). For himself it was the hour of destiny. His Messianic mission was reaching its culmination; the powers of evil were leaguing themselves together against him. Therefore he prayed that he might not fail, but that the path of suffering which he was about to tread might prove to be the path of glory; and that the glory of the Father, whose will he was doing, might be manifested in his completed work.

His thoughts quickly turned from himself to his disciples, and he commends them to the Father's care, and prays that they may be brought into abiding union with the Father and with one another. Concentrating his interest upon them, he says: "I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me" (verse 9); literally, "I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world." Present action is indicated. The reference is to "the prayer which he is at this moment uttering, and not to his general practice" (Bible Commentary *in loco*). The reason why he did not pray for the world at this particular time, as he was accustomed to do, is because of what he was asking. The refrain of his prayer is, "that they may be one" (verse 11); and surely the union of a hostile world would have the very last thing he would have thought of praying for. His thought runs deeper, and at the same time finds more explicit expression in the added words, "even as we

are one," this ideal union having for its pattern not merely the closest, dearest human relationships, but the union existing within the Godhead itself. A higher union than this is not conceivable.

This vital and intimate union which Jesus prayed for is corporate and organic. It is at first, and essentially, a thing of spiritual rather than of external relationship. That it will express itself, and become visible to the eye of men, is inevitable. The necessity for its visible expression is declared to be, "that the world may believe that thou didst send me" (verse 21). The witness of a united church is needed to convince the world that Christ has come as the messenger of the one living and true God. A divided church cannot evoke faith in a universal Christ. In a body in which there is schism Christ cannot find full and perfect expression. Because of her unseemly divisions the church of to-day is shorn of her witnessing power and Christ of the honor of a wider homage. Even if it be admitted that some of the past divisions may have served good ends in giving emphasis to neglected truths, the reason for their continuance has long been outgrown, the distinctive truths for which they stood having become the common heritage of the church. Nothing can be more evident than that in the present day the movement of the Spirit of God is toward union. When Christians of different names and creeds meet together a mighty ground-swell of enlarging life lifts them up and carries them outward, they know not whither. The

Laymen's Missionary Movement, which was followed by the great Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, and that in turn by the Men and Religion Movement, are tokens of still greater things to come, and awaken the hope that the unity of which God's people have dreamed, but which they hardly dared to believe could come before many generations had run their weary course, may find a speedy realization. It is frankly admitted that the present divisions of the church cannot possibly be final; that they present a barrier to the progress of the kingdom, and that they must ultimately pass away, in order that the Saviour's prayer may be fulfilled.

Agreement in prayer for what the Lord has commanded his people to pray is in itself the beginning point of union. If it means anything, it means that personal desires are being subordinated to the interest of Christ's kingdom, and that he is beginning to have his way.

Prayer is prophetic. It sees what is coming. It occupies the mount of vision and looks along the line of God's unfolding purposes. If we are warranted in changing every promise into prayer, we are equally warranted in changing every prayer into a promise. In an emphatic sense Christ's prayer for union carries a promise for union in its bosom. It contains a prophecy which cannot fail of that consummation symbolized in Dante's vision, when the saints throughout all the world, and all the ages, shall resemble the petals of a mighty rose, of which God himself is the glowing center.

(3) *That they might be sanctified.* In his high-priestly prayer of consecration, Jesus, after praying that his people might be united, prays that they might be sanctified; that is, that they might be separated from the world, and set apart to the work of the Kingdom.

While in the world they are not to be of it; but are to find in its ordinary affairs a sphere of divine service. He does not pray for their escape from life's burdens and temptations, but for strength to be given them to bear and to overcome them. He says, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one," or, more generally, "from evil" (verse 15). He asks that they may be kept in the world till their work is done, and that while in the world they may not only be kept from the evil which environs them, and which stains the character and pollutes the springs of the inner life, but that they also "may be sanctified in truth" (verse 19), and thus be made meet for God's use, that they may serve some definite end in the furtherance of the Kingdom.

In all that Jesus asks for his disciples he identifies himself with them, entering with them into the act of self-dedication, and saying, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be truly sanctified" (verse 19). He consecrates himself to them, that they may consecrate themselves to others in his name. He offers himself up sacrificially, that, inspired by his holy, self-

denying love, they may lay themselves upon the altar to be consumed as living sacrifices in the service of humanity. In vain does the Great Intercessor pray for his people unless this end be gained and they are moved by his sacrificial love to put themselves at God's disposal on behalf of others, and to labor unitedly for the establishment upon the earth of his kingdom of righteousness and love.

(4) *That they might share his glory.* The climax of his farewell prayer is contained in the words, "Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundations of the world" (verse 24). He had already said, "The glory which thou hast given me, I have given unto them" (verse 22), given not in promise and anticipation only, but in its earnest and first fruits; and now he wills and prays that they might partake of that glory in all its heavenly fullness. What is the glory which they are to see and share, if not the glory of his completed work of redemption, the glory which a united, holy, and consecrated church will have something to do in bringing about? And what greater boon could the Master ask for his disciples at a time when they are about to enter the valley of humiliation, and face seeming defeat, than that they should be partakers of the glory which he had when in the bosom of the Father, and which as the triumphant Redeemer he has now resumed in a still more resplendent form?

PART SECOND

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS

CHAPTER I

THE MODEL PRAYER

THIS is the first Christian prayer. It was prescribed by Jesus to his disciples at the beginning of his public ministry, and constitutes a bridge connecting the old dispensation and the new. Its form is Jewish—the claim being made that it might be entirely reconstructed from words taken from the Jewish sacred writings. But if its form is Jewish, its spirit is Christian. True, we miss in it certain elements which could only have come later, when the work of Christ was accomplished and the new age of the Spirit was brought in; but, looked at in its place in the development of Christian truth, it is of priceless value as forming the first introduction into the temple of Christian worship.

On this wise this prayer was given; "It came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11. 1). John had evidently taught his disciples some form of prayer, and the disciples of Jesus asked him to do the same. Hitherto he had given no definite instruction regarding prayer. He had taught by example. He had been content to create a prayer-spirit, leaving it free to express itself in whatever form might be deemed

suitable. He laid little stress upon outward forms, knowing full well the tendency for form to degenerate into formality. But the time had come when to the contagion of his example it was necessary that he add specific instruction and direction on the subject of prayer, in order that his disciples might be able to share with him more fully in what was deepest in his own religious experience. Their request, voiced by an unnamed disciple, was, "Master, teach us thy secret, that we may pray as thou prayest." It is not to be inferred that they did not pray up to this time; what they desired was that they might be taught to pray right; or, more explicitly, taught to pray in Christ's way. It was in response to this request that Jesus gave utterance to that simple, direct, and comprehensive prayer, which has become the model of all true prayer, and which is known as The Lord's Prayer.

Matthew's version of "the prayer which teaches to pray" is the one commonly used. It reads thus: "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil *one*" (6. 9-13).

This prayer of prayers sweeps the entire circle of human needs. It teaches the art of prayer and indicates its scope. It was not designed to exhaust the subject of prayer, but merely to be suggestive, and set the thought of the world in the right direc-

tion. Its simple words contain within them the germs of an endless development. It was never meant to be formally repeated, or slavishly imitated, but simply to supply, in matter and manner, an example of true and acceptable prayer. Moreover, its contextual setting clearly shows that it was primarily meant to assist in the practice of private prayer.

Taking this prayer as Christ's first lesson on the subject of prayer and looking at it broadly, we find that—

1. *It Strikes the Note of Universality.*

Although limited in its original application to Christ's disciples, it is a prayer in which all devout souls of every creed can join. Hence one of the titles suggested for it is, "The Universal Prayer." At the World's Parliament of Religion in Chicago the representatives of the leading faiths of the world repeated it in unison, at the opening of every session. Voicing, as it does, the world-wide and essential wants of the common heart of man, by it

> The whole round world is every way
> Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

2. *It is an Organic Whole.*

It is not a series of detached and unrelated utterances. "In its seven petitions," says De Wette, "it expresses the whole course of human experience; in the first three the unhindered flight of the Spirit of God; in the next three, the hindrances opposed

to this experience in earthly circumstances, and by the conflict with sin; while the last petition expresses the solution which harmonizes the conflict." If the number of separate petitions be reduced to six—which is evidently the right division—the unity of the whole is no less apparent. All the petitions blend together like the hues of the rainbow, and harmonize the out-breathed desires of man's eternal soul with the eternal order, and with the eternal God.

3. *It Expresses a New Conception of God.*

Out of this conception a new life of prayer was to spring. In answering the request of his disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray," the first thing that Jesus did was to give them a right conception of the One to whom they were to pray. He turned their thoughts from the act of praying to the object of prayer. He said to them, "When ye pray, say, Our Father"—not "Our Creator," or "Our King," but, "Our Father"—our own Father, and the Father of all. Jesus himself always addressed God as Father. He lived in filial relationship with him, and exercised toward him filial trust. In this experience he sought to have all men share. He taught them that his Father was their Father, and that their true life as sons of God could be realized only in the knowledge and recognition of his fatherly interest and love. This is the basic truth upon which all his teaching rests.

The idea of God as a Father, wise and loving

and tender—a Father holding personal relations with every man—was something entirely new. The Jewish people, among whom the highest water mark of religious thought had been reached, conceived of God as a Father in a national sense, as in the words of Jehovah to Pharaoh, "Israel is my son, my first-born" (Exod. 4. 22), but never once did they rise to the conception of God as a Father in a personal, vital, and affectional sense. It was left to Jesus to give the world this higher view of divine Fatherhood, and to teach the children of men that they are to begin to pray by recognizing their filial relationship to God. He teaches that the highest prayer is not the address of the creature to the Creator, nor the appeal of the subject to the King, but the cry of the child to the Father, and that the essential thing in true prayer is not creature dependence but filial dependence, not creature confidence but filial confidence.

The first thing, then, to consider in reference to prayer is not, Am I praying in the right way? but Am I praying to the right person? Is my thought directed to the Father? Have I taken my place of privilege in God's house as a child? Is my intercourse with the Great God, whose presence fills the universe, the intercourse of a child with his father? Alas! there are many who resemble the priest of whom Fogazzaro says, in his posthumous novel Leila: "Divine paternity was to him rather a formula in which he believed than a truth which he felt, and which was precious to him. With his lips he

called him Father, while in his heart he felt him to be a monarch." No one really occupies the Christian ground who does not plant his feet unfalteringly upon the reality and centrality of the divine Fatherhood.

This new conception of God which Jesus has furnished not only gives a new significance to prayer, it is creative of prayer itself. It generates the spirit of prayer; it awakens the desire to pray; it provides a new incentive to pray; it affords a new ground for confidence in prayer; it determines the very nature of man's approach to God and of his intercourse with him, for what is more natural than that a child should go to his father in his trouble and need? A true father will delight to give; he will give without a grudge; and, if he is wise as well as kind, he will give only what is for his children's good. In the hands of such a father the praying soul can confidently rest his case.

As our Father God yearns for our fellowship. He wants us to speak to him. If we have wandered far from him, he welcomes us back. He does not become our Father when we return to him; we return to him because he is our Father. In revealing himself as Father he acknowledges his responsibility to us as his children and our interest in all that he possesses. When out of our hearts comes the cry of need his response ever is, "Son, all that I have is thine."

To strengthen the assurance that the Father to whom we pray is able to meet every demand, Jesus

represents him as in heaven, and hence possessed of heavenly power. Heaven is his dwelling place. When we pray to him we look heavenward. Heaven is above, not in a geographical but in a spiritual sense. From the upper sphere God looketh down; he bends a listening ear to the cry of his children and meets their heavenward gaze with the vision of his presence. When they call he "answers out of his holy heaven, with the saving strength of his right hand," bringing the riches of the heavenly realm into the possession of their uplifted hearts.

4. *It Places God's Glory Before Our Personal Good.*

How natural it is to think of ourselves first, and to ask first of all for the supply of our personal wants! But the Master teaches us to keep these in abeyance, to put God first in our thoughts, and to seek first in our prayer his kingdom and his righteousness. Hence the first three petitions have reference to God's honor, and the advancement of his kingdom, which are the things which the objects of absorbing interest among the inhabitants of heaven, in this regard contrasting with the other three petitions, which are earth-prayers, and which have exclusive reference to earthly conditions and needs.

(1) *The first thing prayed for is the hallowing of the Father's name.* "Our Father who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name"; that is, "May thy name as Father, thy name as the archetypal

Father, whose throne is heaven, and whose footstool is the earth, be known and revered through all the world; may it be hallowed in the hearts of all men, and on all the lips of all men." The name of God stands for his character, for his essential being; it denotes what he is, so that when his name is hallowed he himself is exalted and glorified by every praying soul, and by all who have his fear in their hearts.

(2) *Desire expressed for the coming of the Kingdom.* "Our Father who art in heaven, thy kingdom come." Here Fatherhood and Kinghood are conjoined. The kingdom for whose coming we are to pray is the kingdom of the Father. Our prayer is to be, "May the kingdom of righteousness and love over which the heavenly Father reigns, continue to increase until it is acknowledged by all."

The desire for the coming of the Kingdom is the central thing in prayer. It underlies all other desires. It destroys self-seeking, lifts us above our petty interests, and leads us to find outside of ourselves the final end of our spiritual quest. Our prayers are often poor and paltry by reason of the narrowness of our outlook, and the smallness of our interests; but prayer for the Kingdom, when offered understandingly, brings us into a larger place. It absorbs our thought in God, and puts his honor uppermost. It makes us desire that his cause may succeed even if our personal ends should fail, that his name be enthroned if our worldly power and glory should be trampled in the dust.

The kingdom sought is God's, because it comes from him. It comes by the working of his power. It is first of all a reign, then a realm; first a divine ideal implanted in the heart, afterwards a divine ideal realized in human life and society. In its completed form as a new social order, which has no territorial limits, but which runs through all other kingdoms, it is the goal of history and the consummation of the purpose of redemption. The fact that we are enjoined to pray for the coming of the Father's kingdom is a guarantee that it is coming. And if our prayer is sincere, we virtually pledge ourselves to answer it as far as possible by doing everything in our power to bring it to pass.

(3) *The wish is expressed that God's will may be everywhere done.* "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." To bring heaven into closer relationship with earth, to restore earth to its lost oneness with heaven, to get men everywhere to bow their necks in loving submission to the will of the heavenly Father, was the religious aim of Jesus. And here he directs us to pray that this might be accomplished. The prayer which he puts into our lips is, in substance, this: "May a heavenly spirit come into the earthly life, that the practice of the heavenly life may now begin; may the will of God, which is the standard of moral action in all worlds, be done here below as it is done in heaven above by the holy angels, and by "the spirits of just men made perfect." That this may be realized a revelation of the heavenly life was needed. This has

been given *by* Jesus, and *in* Jesus; who, by always doing the will of the Father, gave a transcript of that life of perfect obedience to the Father's will which characterizes the inhabitants of heaven. In his life as a man he showed to men the way in which the heavenly life is to be lived on earth.

This petition reaches the highest-water mark of prayer. To secure the end which it seeks, to bring the mutinous spirit of man into complete submission to the divine will, to get heavenly laws obeyed on earth, to get heavenly ways adopted on earth, is to realize the glory of God here below and to make of earth a suburb of heaven.

5. *It Sets Forth the Supremacy of the Spiritual in Prayer.*

There are five petitions for spiritual blessings, and only one for temporal blessings. Most prayers reverse this proportion.

(1) *The prayer for temporal blessings is a prayer for necessary things*—not a prayer for superfluities, but for "things needful for the body." Having sought God's glory in prayer, we are free to consider our personal needs. In taking up our personal needs we begin with the lowest. We ask for bread. We say, "Give us this day our daily bread." Bread here stands for whatever we may need for our sustenance. It stands for temporal blessings in general. The Greek word *epiousion*, which in the Authorized and Revised Versions is rendered "daily," has introduced great difficulty. It is a

word which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, or in Greek literature. A variety of meanings have been attached to it. There are two marginal readings, the first being, "Give us our bread for the coming day," and the other, "Give us this day our needful bread." The latter rendering is undoubtedly the correct one. Wendt renders it "appertaining bread," that is, the bread appertaining to our need. Some regard it as referring to spiritual bread—"the true bread which came down from heaven," the bread of our deepest need. The rendering of the Vulgate is *panis superstantialis,* that is, the bread which is over and above material substance. But even if this be included, and the word be taken to cover all that pertains to the nourishment of the higher and lower life of man, the primary reference is, without doubt, to temporal bread.

This simple prayer for the means of sustenance we are to offer in childlike trust, leaving it to the All-Father to give us what is necessary for to-day and to-morrow, and to give in the way he deems best. He may feed us by ravens, or he may give us strength to work for our bread; but in either case the supply is sure, and whatever be the way in which it comes, it is the gift of his mercy. The period of time for which we are to ask him to make provision is significant. "It is an arrangement designed to bring man to his Father each day" (E. J. Bosworth).

(2) *The prayer for spiritual blessings is a prayer*

for essential things. It goes to the core of man's spiritual problem, voicing his need at the deepest point.

(*a*) *It is, in the first place, a plea for forgiveness.* "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." The first cry of the soul is a cry for mercy. There is in the breast of every man a consciousness of sin, a consciousness that things have been done which ought not to have been done. There is also a sense of undischarged obligations. If duty is what is *due,* and if a man ought to do what he *owed* to do, then to fail in giving others what we owe them is to fail in doing what we ought to do for them. For the word "debts," the other evangelists substitute the words "trespasses" and "sins." To pray for forgiveness is to pray that sins of every kind—sins of omission and of commission alike be blotted out.

The customary expression, "as we forgive," ought to read, "as we also have forgiven." It presupposes that those who pray for forgiveness have already in their hearts forgiven others. If they have not, their prayer for forgiveness is vain, and the only bridge by which they themselves can return to God has been broken down.

(*b*) *Having prayed for the forgiveness of sins, we are to pray for deliverance from sin.* "And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil *one.*" The former prayer is the cry of guilt; this is the cry of weakness. It is the cry of a soul shrinking from suffering; the cry of a soul

that dreads the winnowing process of tribulation; the cry of a soul that fears lest the fiery trials that confront him should prove too much for his strength. Complete exemption from trial is not sought, but merely escape from trials that might be greater than one was able to bear.

But when the trial has to be met, when faith has to be severely tested, our prayer must be, "Deliver us from evil." Emancipate us from evil, in whatever form it may come; break its power, that our souls may escape from its cruel grasp, "like a bird from the snare of the fowler."

6. *It Emphasizes the Social Element in Prayer.*

It is not an individualistic but a social prayer, and as such appeals profoundly to the newly awakened social consciousness of to-day.

Frederick Harrison maintains that all prayer is a form of selfishness. It is not so. True prayer cleanses the heart from the veriest taint of selfish desire. It leads us to think of others; it forbids us to seek our own interests as against the interests of others. "*Meum* and *tuum*," says Luther, "are not Christian words." When we pray Christianly we not only remember our fellow suppliants but we seek to voice the unspoken desire of all those who do not pray for themselves. Hence, as Chrysostom has said, we are taught "to make our prayer common, on behalf of our brethren also. For he saith, not, 'My Father which art in heaven,' but, 'Our Father,' offering up his supplication for the body

in common, and nowhere looking to his own, but everywhere to his neighbor's good."

"The sky is the roof of but one family." Men are related to one another because related to the one Father. Sons of God are brothers one of another. There is no true brotherhood of man that is not founded upon the Fatherhood of God.

If God is the universal Father, men are bound together in fraternal bonds. They are members of a common household, which has common wants, common interests, and common ends. They ought, therefore, to live as brethren, each one seeking the family welfare as he seeks his own.

That brotherhood may be actualized Jesus has taught us to pray this prayer. We are not to go into the throne-room alone, but are to kneel by the side of every praying soul, letting the little rill of our prayer flow into the mighty stream of petition which is ascending to the eternal throne; we are to make common cause with all our brethren, making their varied needs the burden of our prayer; nor are we to pray merely for special advantages and favors for those within the circle of our personal friendship, but are to pray for all alike. When a Christian asks God to supply his own needs he is to ask him to supply the needs of all his brethren also. He is to pray, "*Our* Father who art in heaven, give *us our* needful bread." The whole human family, of which he is part, is to be embraced in his benevolent desire. So in his prayer for spiritual blessings he is to ask, "Forgive

us our debts." As we are all involved in a common guilt, may we be objects of a common mercy! "Bring *us* not into temptation, but deliver *us* from the evil *one*." Let not the sifting process be too severe with any one of us; temper the wind to the shorn lamb; and when the hour of conflict comes, deliver our fluttered, defenseless souls from the power of the enemy.

Thus, far from being self-centered and selfish, this model prayer awakens world-wide sympathies, and binds men together as members of God's great human family. Instead of isolating it unites; instead of wrapping men up in themselves it draws them out of themselves to seek for others what the Father of all is seeking. It can be truly offered only by those who have been taught of Christ, and have imbibed his spirit. "Every Christian," says Luther, "offers an everlasting Lord's prayer." And since to his praying his life will be keyed, the praying of the model prayer will lead to the living of the model life.

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRIT IN WHICH WE ARE TO PRAY

As Jesus in his ethical teaching puts the emphasis upon the principle or spirit of moral action rather than upon the overt act, so in prayer he puts the emphasis upon the inner spirit rather than upon the outward form. He shows that the spirit, and not outward form, is the essential thing; that the form is only the shell which preserves the life within. One lesson—namely, that supplied by the model prayer—was sufficient to deal with the matter and manner of prayer; in his subsequent teaching he deals almost exclusively with the spirit of prayer. His instruction on this point is very searching. It brings to light the hidden things of the heart, and shows what is to be avoided, as well as what is to be done.

1. *He Teaches That We Are to Pray with Sincerity.*

"When ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward" (Matt. 6. 5). These religious play-actors, whose example Jesus tells us to

shun, sought to attract the attention of others while performing their devotions. As they stood up in the synagogue or at the street corners they kept glancing around from under the *tallith,* or prayer-cloth, that covered their heads. Instead of thinking of God alone, and speaking to him alone, they thought only of man, and addressed a human audience. Their devotion was a pitiful masquerade. They were not what they seemed to be. They had no sense of God's presence, no conscious outgoing of the heart toward him. In the place of self-effacement there was parade and ostentation; in the place of simplicity there was duplicity; in the place of childlikeness of spirit there was pride. Their praying was something which they expected to have laid to their credit. Looking to man's applause as their reward, they missed the reward of heaven. Their praying was everything that it ought not to have been. Hence the warning, "Be ye not like unto them."

2. With Thoughtfulness.

"In praying use not vain repetitions as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matt. 6. 7). Wendt renders these words, "When ye pray, do not babble as the heathen do." Luther's word is "blatter." It is not repetition that is here condemned, but empty, meaningless repetition, like that of the worshipers of Baal, who called upon his name from morning even until noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us." Earnest

prayer is apt to be repetitious. A child keeps asking his mother for something in the same words; he keeps pushing his single request, until she decisively refuses or surrenders. We are to urge our plea in prayer in the same way. Jesus in the Garden prayed, "saying again the same words" (Matt. 26. 44). His prayer was repetitious, but not vainly so. It expressed the white-heat of intense desire.

There is much aimless prayer; prayer without premeditation; prayer that is from the teeth outward; prayer that consists in "eloquent and unctious phrases," which signify nothing to the one who utters them. These prayers do not bear the hall-mark of reality. They are words and nothing more. Augustine makes a distinction between much *speaking* and much *praying*. He says, "We may pray most when we say least, and we may pray least when we say most." The Gentiles thought they would be heard for the multiplication of *words* rather than for the multiplication of *prayers*. Their mistake was a common one. Luther remarks, "Few words and much meaning is Christian; many words and little meaning is heathenish." We smile at the Tibetan and his prayer-wheel, while praying ourselves in the same mechanical fashion. We have need to remember that it is not the length but the strength of prayers; not their size but their spiritual content; not their quantity but their quality, that renders them acceptable to God.

3. *With a Forgiving Spirit.*

"Whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against anyone; that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11. 25). "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6. 14, 15). A forgiving spirit is a prime condition of acceptable approach to God. It is one of the distinctive marks of a Christian. The man who does not possess it has not the spirit of Christ, and has no standing before the Father as his spiritual child. It is expected that one who has been forgiven of God will forgive his brother.

> The sandal tree perfumes when riven
> The ax that laid it low,
> Let him who hopes to be forgiven,
> Forgive and bless his foe.

A spirit of forgiveness is one of the first fruits of Christian experience. "What can Jesus Christ do for you now?" exclaimed a cruel taskmaster, who was inflicting severe and unmerited punishment upon a slave. "He can help me to forgive you," was the reply. Whoever has not learned to forgive his brother man has not received his first lesson in the school of Christ; and when he prays the heavens above him will be as brass, and his prayers will come bounding back upon his own spirit, while he himself stands outside the circle within which divine mercy operates.

4. *With Self-Denial.*

"Worshiping with fastings and supplications night and day" (Luke 2. 37). "This kind can come out by nothing, save by prayer and fasting" (Mark 9. 29). The two words "and fasting," in the latter text, are omitted from some of the best manuscripts, but many ancient authorities contain them. They are probably authentic; and they are certainly in harmony with subsequent apostolic teaching. Prayer and fasting are often connected in the writings of the apostles; and, what is still more significant, they have been connected in practice throughout the Christian centuries. The great saints have prayed with fasting.

Jesus himself neither enjoins nor forbids fasting, but he often assumes its practice by his followers. He was no ascetic. "He came eating and drinking," yet he recognized fasting as appropriate to times of sorrow, and as profitable in securing certain spiritual ends in Christian experience. He did not look upon it as a thing meritorious in itself, but simply as a means of obtaining self-conquest. By detachment from the physical, closer attachment to the spiritual was to be won; by keeping the body under the spirit was to be kept on the top; by unloosing the hold upon earth-life the soul was to be able to rise on the wings of prayer to its native heaven, and become open to a new infilling of divine power.

5. *With Watchfulness.*

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Mark 14. 38). "Watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21. 36). "Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is" (Mark 13. 33).

Prayer is no substitute for action. It is effective when it works itself out. The answer to it generally comes when man himself cooperates with God in bringing it to pass. We are not warranted in asking God to do anything for us that we can do ourselves; but we are warranted in asking him for help to do our own work efficiently. Nothing is accomplished without his aid, and nothing is accomplished without the use of means. "I turn my camel loose, and commit him to God," said one of his followers to Mohammed. "First tie up your camel and then commit him to God," was the reply of the prophet.

The conjunction of watchfulness and prayer in the texts quoted implies that the one who prays will shun the temptations from which he asks God to keep him; that he will have a sharp eye for any loophole of escape; and that while faithful to his appointed task, he will maintain a sleepless outlook for the return of "the Lord of the house." He will use prayer as a safeguard of the soul, preparing by it beforehand for the sifting of soul that

may come in the duties and temptations of the day. Never will he reach a position in which the need for prayer and watchfulness is outgrown. Madam Guyon professed the doctrine of complete sanctification, yet she admits that she found it necessary to watch and pray, and to guard against spiritual pride, inasmuch as her state was only one of "comparative immutability." The introduction of the word "comparative" saved her intellectual and spiritual sanity. There is no one, however firmly founded, who cannot be moved from his base; and because of that fact he dare not at any time cease to watch and pray.

6. *With Importunity.*

"And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine is come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee? I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is a friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth" (Luke 11. 5-8). This dramatic parable, which Luke places at the close of the Model Prayer, has for its lesson the true grounds of urgency in prayer. It is a parable of contrast, and illustrates the difference between selfish compliance and benevolent respon-

siveness. The reluctance of the churlish neighbor is real, the reluctance of the heavenly Father is seeming. Delay is not denial. Reasons may exist why a petition should not be granted at once, but no reason exists why God should withhold from his children what they really *need*.

God is as unlike this unfriendly, disobliging neighbor as it is possible to conceive. He does not give grudgingly. We do not require to wring a reluctant blessing from his hand. He delights to give; and if he withholds for a time, he is pleased with our urgency, although grieved that we should so often misunderstand his real feeling toward us. "We prevail with men by importunity," says Matthew Henry, "because they are *displeased*, but with God because he is *pleased* with it." The certainty that God is interested in us, and is ready to answer our prayer is our encouragement, and affords a reasonable ground for importunity. Alford points out the closer connection between the parable and the words that follow, "Ask, and it shall be given you," and sees in this completed truth a revelation of "the great law of our Father's spiritual kingdom—a clause out of the eternal covenant which cannot be changed."

7. With Persistency.

"And he spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18. 1). The parable to which these words are the preface is that of the unrighteous judge

and the troublesome widow. Its object is the same as that of the preceding parable, and it resembles it still further in being a parable of contrast; but, whereas in the former parable the contrast is between a selfish neighbor and the heavenly Friend, here the contrast is between an unjust judge and the righteous Father.

Because God is well disposed prayer should be persistent. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint"; that is, they ought to pray, and stay for the answer; they ought to pray through to the very end; not fainting because the way is long, and the answer slow in coming. The reason for persistence is not that it overcomes divine reluctance but that it finds a sure and certain response in divine willingness. We hold on and hold out because we know that our Father will not say us nay. We are all prone to grow remiss in prayer. Habit stales. Long-continued strain produces lassitude. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." The hands hang down; and prayer, if not altogether given up, is continued in a feeble way, through the ever-decreasing momentum of a past experience. To rally our spiritual forces, and keep us upon our knees, Jesus told this story of the unrighteous judge who was moved to redress this widow, not as an act of justice, but because she kept plaguing him by her continual coming, and he asks, "Shall not the righteous Father, who is rich in mercy and ready to help, answer the cry for redress of his own elect, who are forever dear to him?" That is to

say, If persistent pleading prevails over apathy, how much more will it prevail over love?

To this question Jesus answers, "I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." There will be no unnecessary delay. If the divine Father appears to tarry, it is because the proper hour has not yet struck, or because the petitioner is not prepared to receive what he has asked. The answer is to be calmly awaited. God will give it as speedily as possible, in view of all the interests involved; not because he has been teased and worried into compliance, but because he delights to give whenever he wisely can. A quiet trust in his love will lead us to keep praying on with a holy persistency that knows no abatement, while patiently waiting the outworking of his will.

8. *With Humility.*

To impress the hearts of men with the need of humility in prayer, Jesus tells this story: "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a sinner. I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that

exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18. 10-14). In the introduction to this story or parable it is stated that it was spoken for the benefit of "certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at naught." Its object was to expose and to condemn the sin of self-righteousness. With the Jewish people the vain-glorious Pharisee was the model saint. They worshiped the very ground upon which he trod. How astonished and confounded therefore they must have been when Jesus, as a revolutionist in morals, hurled him from his pedestal, and put in his place the penitent publican—thus giving to the world a new model of piety.

With a few sharp strokes he puts into bold relief the characteristics of these two men, showing that while engaging in the same act of worship they were as the poles asunder. The Pharisee stood up boldly, with eyes and hands uplifted, and prayed "with himself" or "to himself"—ashamed to utter aloud the thoughts which his heart conceived. What he looked upon as prayer was really a soliloquy, which failed to ascend to heaven. In a spirit of self-gratulation he begins with a recital of the catalogue of his virtues. He thanks the Lord that he is a shining exception to the rest of men. He is not unjust in his dealings; he is not guilty of open sin; if he cannot boast of a clean heart, he can boast of clean hands. He fasts every Monday and Thursday; he tithes everything he earns—going in

both of these matters beyond the strict requirements of the law. Puffed up with pride and self-complacency, he looks upon the Lord as his debtor for his work of supererogation; and upon his fellow worshipers standing in the rear he looks with a feeling of the utmost disdain. Self-deluded as to his real condition and to the issue of his prayer, he goes down from the temple to his house condemned of heaven.

The publican, on the other hand, with an utter absence of self-assurance, bends his eyes earthward, while lifting his heart heavenward, and smites upon his breast in token of contrition, exclaiming, "God, be propitious to me *the* sinner." He makes no pretense, and no apology. As a member of an ostracized class he has no reputation to maintain. Moved by a deep sense of sinfulness, he casts himself in humility and self-abasement upon the mercy of God, with the result that his prayer is accepted, and he goes down to his house justified in the sight of heaven. "The Pharisee justified himself," says Dr. A. T. Pierson, "but God condemns him; the publican condemns himself, but God justifies him. From the lips of a sinner no other prayer than that of the humble taxgatherer is befitting, and no other will prevail."

9. *With Confidence in God's Responsiveness.*

"I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and

he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke 11. 9, 10).

This exhortation follows the parable of the unneighborly neighbor in which man's unresponsiveness is contrasted with God's responsiveness. We are heartened to ask that we may receive because we come to a friendly God, who is willing and ready to give us everything that we need. There is here an ascending climax. We are to "ask" in the sense of making formal request; we are to "seek" in the sense of prosecuting our quest; we are to "knock" in the sense of making urgent and repeated demands; and whether we pray for ourselves or for others, we are to keep on asking until we receive, and seeking until we find, and knocking until the door is opened.

In all these experiences there is more than aspiration, more than desire, more than "the continual disposition of prayer"—there is actual, formal, definite petition. What the soul strongly desires it strongly pleads for; its desire is kindled into a blaze of earnest intreaty. It is clamorously insistent, eagerly acquisitive, greedily appropriative.

The ground for confident asking is placed by Jesus in God's fatherly relation to the children of men. "Of which of you that is a father shall his son ask a loaf, and he give him a stone? or a fish, and he for a fish give him a serpent? Or, if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly

Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Verses 11-13.) In the words "how much more" we have an argument from the less to the greater; from the limited knowledge of the earthly father to the unlimited knowledge of the heavenly Father. The one to whom we pray is one who knows us perfectly; he knows our needs; he knows all the circumstances of our lives; he knows what is the absolute best for us in any condition in which we can be placed.

Not only does he know, he also loves. His providential, foreseeing, fatherly care is over and around us. His hand is stretched to bless us, and to guide us in all the affairs of life. His responsiveness is the responsiveness of one who is sensitive to the slightest touch of appeal, and who is too good to keep back anything that he can safely bestow. He gives "good things," according to Matthew; or the best and highest thing, namely, "the Holy Spirit," according to Luke. To every suppliant he throws open the doors of the heavenly treasure house, saying, "My child, all that is mine is thine; for thee it is held, to thee will I minister it for thy good and not for thy hurt."

Does anyone want to know what the God to whom he prays is like? Then let him turn to Jesus, in whose life of gracious, tender ministry the fatherly heart of God is revealed. To every one who sought his help he responded at once. If a sufferer but touched the hem of his robe, power was emitted, and he was made perfectly whole. His

responsiveness to the demands made upon him was not merely an illustration of the responsiveness of God; it *was* the responsiveness of God. It was the response of a divine, personal Friend, touched with a feeling of human infirmity; a Friend who could not turn away the prayer of the weakest and the unworthiest from him, nor give a stone to anyone who asked for bread; a Friend who will always give what in his unerring wisdom he deems it best that any suppliant should receive.

CHAPTER III

GENERAL TEACHINGS

1. *On Secret Prayer.*

"When thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seest in secret shall recompense thee" (Matt. 6. 6). There is a social side to prayer; and there is also a solitary side. There is prayer in which spirits blend, and there is prayer in which God and the individual soul alone are concerned—a communion with heaven so close and intimate that the mystics have described it as "being alone with the Alone."

To attain this inner fellowship certain things are demanded. The first of these is separation from the world of external things, the breaking, as far as possible, connection with the outer world, the barring of the door of the senses, the silencing of the noises that drown the voice of God. In effecting this there should be an absence of all unseemly haste; every movement should be deliberate and leisurely; and ample time should be taken to hear God out. Commenting on this text, William Law remarks, "Now, here is, indeed, no mention of time that prayer is to be continued; but yet this preparation for prayer—of entering into the closet and shutting the door—seems to teach us that it is a

work of some time; that we are not hastily to open the door, but to allow ourselves time to continue to be importunate in prayer." And he reasons that by frequent and continued prayer the spirit of prayer is begotten and nourished; that what the mouth asks the heart may come to desire; that, in short, we can "pray ourselves into devotion," and that, as Jeremy Taylor remarks, "If we pray often, we shall pray oftener."

It is possible, however, to withdraw outwardly from the world, and take the world with us into our place of retirement. We may go apart with our little handful of cares, and fix our thoughts upon them; we may nurse our sorrows, brood over our real or fancied wrongs, and, forgetting the tryst we have promised to keep, overlook the presence of "the Father who seeth in secret," and who is waiting for us, that he may take away every burden from our hearts.

With separation from the world there must go concentration of the mind upon the object of worship. We are to enter into the silence leaving behind all that would divide the attention and distract the thought. Thomas Aquinas argues that "he prays in spirit and in truth, whoever goes to prayer with the spirit and intention of praying, though afterward through misery and frailty his thoughts may wander." That is true; yet everyone ought to endeavor to get the mastery of himself, and to keep his thoughts from wandering. He ought, by a strenuous effort of the will, to control his wayward,

vagrant thoughts, compelling them to turn in a new direction, and fixing them steadily upon God, for the main object of his retirement is not that he may become familiar with himself, but that he may become familiar with God. He leaves the multitude at the tent door, that he may enter into the secret place and learn the mind of his Great Commander, by whose authoritative word his every act is controlled.

But while outward seclusion is an advantage for quiet, refreshing converse with God, it is not a necessity. We can find God in the crowded street car as well as in nature's solitudes; we can make a little sanctuary in the heart, where we are much alone with him as in the most peaceful sylvan retreat. As another has said, "Solitude may be found amidst the crowd, and society in the desert." "Everyone," says Jeremy Taylor, "can build a chapel in his breast, himself the priest, his heart the sacrifice, and the earth he treads on the altar."

> There is a viewless cloistered room
> As high as heaven, as fair as day,
> Where, though my feet may join the throng,
> My soul can enter in, and pray.

The closet is the *closed* place; the place from which the world is closed out, the place where the soul is closed in with God. In this closed place the soul may not only talk *to* God, but *with* him. The two are there alone, and hold the holiest communion.

Outward separation is often unattainable, inward separation never is.

2. *The Almightiness of the Prayer of Faith.*

"All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21. 22). "All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11. 24). A more literal rendering of Mark's words would be, "Believe that ye *have* received them, and ye shall have them"; that is, claim the thing asked for as yours; affirm your right to its possession; lay hands upon it, appropriating it to yourself, saying, "It is already mine," and stagger not at the greatness of the difficulties to be overcome or of the work to be done; for "whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it" (Mark 11. 23).

These words are not to be taken literally. They belong to the language of poetry. They have no reference to the workings of external changes in the realm of nature. All that they can possibly mean is that there are no obstacles, however great, that can permanently impede the conquering prayer of faith. Mountains of difficulty lie in the way obstructing the path of the Christian and obstructing the progress of the Kingdom. These he can neither scale, nor get around. They must be removed; but how? What hand is strong enough to

tear them from their socket and hurl them into the sea? Jesus says the hand of the man who believes, and doubts not. Believes in what and in whom? Not he that believes in himself, surely. Faith in ourself does indeed work wonders. "They can because they believe they can," said Virgil of the winning crew in his famous boat race. But this is not the faith referred to here. The faith that removes mountains is not faith in one's own power but faith in the power of God. To remove the apparently insurmountable, Jesus says, "Have faith in God," literally, "Have the faith of God"; not, of course, the faith of which he is the subject, but the faith of which he is the object—the faith which terminates on him and rests in him; namely, faith in his illimitable resources, and in his infinite power.

The power of faith is in its object. In the feeblest faith omnipotence is hidden, and through it omnipotence works. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed," says Jesus in another connection, "nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17. 20). By faith we are united to the power of God, which, working in us and through us, accomplishes marvelous results. This union being moral, safeguards the use of power, and guarantees that there will be no desire to do anything except what God wants to have done. "When the desire reaches the will of God, and entering into it settles itself there, it has laid hold of omnipotence. No wonder therefore that all things are possible to the faith that goes along with it" (Morison, *in loco*). No

wonder, indeed, when within and behind the believing soul are all the forces of the universe, so that it is not he that acts, but God who acts through him. And since to God belongs the power, to him be the glory forever.

It was the usual way with Jesus, in stating truth, to speak without qualification; putting no shading in his picture, and adding no reservation to his promise. By adopting this method he sought to startle men to thought, and to awaken them to a sense of the greatness of spiritual facts and the almightiness of spiritual forces. His "whatsoever ye will," and "whatsoever ye shall ask," represent all limitations as giving way to faith-filled prayer, but his general teaching makes it clear that the prayer of faith is limitless within limits. Reason must always be employed in the interpretation of his teachings, which are to be taken in their entirety, one expression qualifying and explaining another. Due account must also be made of the fact that as an Oriental Jesus uses figures of speech which seem colorless and tame when translated into our cold and prosaic Occidental terms. We must therefore beware of paring down such words as those before us until all their force is lost. After all necessary qualifications have been made they will be found to teach that the prayer of faith has a sphere of its own in which it possesses a kind of "vicarious omnipotence."

The history of the church furnishes a long list of saints who through faith achieved the impossible.

Among the modern instances perhaps no one is pointed to more frequently than George Muller. His was a faith that could remove mountains. Professor James describes him as "a sturdy beggar," who took the promises of God seriously and literally, and who would not let God off until he gave him what he asked. Grant that his faith was put into a somewhat narrow setting, still it was real and vital, and full of force like a rock-bound stream. Everything had to give way before it. God honored it as he honors the strong faith of every saint, however much it may be mixed up with human frailty or with imperfect vision of his wider plan. To the humble Christian it brings comfort unspeakable to know that the promise does not read "according to your knowledge be it unto you," but "according to your faith." In the prayer-life the kingdom is given to the childlike. To the faith-born prayer of the feeblest saint everything that stands in the way of the fulfillment of God's *purpose of grace* must ultimately yield.

3. *Exceptions.*

"Pray that your flight be not in the winter" (Mark 13. 18). The people to whom these words were addressed were living on the edge of one of the world's greatest catastrophes. As they beheld the gathering clouds they were forbidden to pray that the storm might not break and were told merely to pray that they might be able to adjust themselves to it, that its severity might be miti-

gated. When the decree of God has gone forth and his purpose has been clearly declared, there are judgments coming for the removal of which no prayer avails.

Volumes have been written recounting marvelous answers to prayer, especially in warding off disaster; but many more volumes might be written telling of similar prayers that were not answered. The list of answered prayers of this kind is more than offset by the list of unanswered prayers. And since one exception shatters a theory, the theory that *all* prayer for deliverance from danger is answered must go. The testimony of experience is overwhelmingly against it.

A ship is driven on the rocks and is fast sinking, when in answer to prayer the captain of a passing vessel, who has been strangely moved to change his course, comes to its relief. This is regarded as wonderful providence; and so it is. But soon after another ship strikes the same rocks and springs a leak. On board are some of God's own, who raise an agonizing cry to a mute heaven. No timely deliverance comes, and they are engulfed in the waves, at the very moment when they are upon their knees.

An earthquake occurs, by which a busy, prosperous city is converted into one vast sepulcher. Some of the people while fleeing blindly from danger have hairbreadth escapes, for which they afterward meet and return thanks to God. But what of the rest? What of those who between

the shocks rush for refuge to the churches, and while in the act of imploring the God of heaven to stay his hand are entombed in the falling walls? Similar cases readily suggest themselves. Pestilence stalks through the land. It enters a praying family, two members of which are stricken down; one is taken and the other left. Two people are caught in the grip of the same fell disease; they pray to the same God and Father; one recovers and the other dies. Two guileless, undefended maidens are exposed to an unnameable danger; both pray for divine protection; one is rescued from between "the horns of the wild oxen," the other is gored to death. A nation is upon its knees pleading for the life of its ruler at the time when a mother is upon her knees pleading for the life of her worthless son; the life of the honored and useful ruler is taken, and the life of the worthless lad is spared. Cases like these present real difficulties touching the efficacy of prayer. When a favorable answer is given, faith is confirmed; when it is denied, faith is often irretrievably shattered. Any theory of prayer that ignores any of these facts must utterly fail to yield satisfaction and to win acceptance.

This difficulty may be looked at from another point of view, as for example, when two opposing armies, both alike convinced of the justice of their cause, plead for victory; or when two ships going in opposite directions pray for favoring winds; or when two farmers pray for a change of weather,

the one praying for rain because his soil is light and dry, the other praying for fair weather because his soil is heavy and wet. It is clear that God cannot answer all of these prayers. To answer one he has to deny the other.

How are these difficulties to be met? That is indeed a hard question; and it is a question to which only a partial answer can be given. It must be admitted that God, having control of all the forces of the universe, is able to prevent these catastrophes. That he does not always do so indicates that he is not ruling this world for material ends. Nowhere does he promise his people exemption from outward ills. If one of his saints can sing, "This poor man cried, and Jehovah heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles," another saint, equally worthy has to confess, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and allowed him to remain in the thick of his troubles." In the present order of things physical evil has a place. It comes to all, to the innocent as well as to the guilty. The laws of nature often seem to operate without regard to the moral condition to those they hurt. God may interfere—those who believe in the efficacy of prayer must believe that he sometimes does—but that is not his usual way. Just because he is ruling the world for moral ends he allows those things to exist; and just because he is ordering the affairs of life for moral ends he allows men to suffer. Sickness, suffering, disaster belong to a sinful and disordered world. In a perfect state they could not

exist. And if we could only see far enough into the future, all these dark things would be seen to be taken up into the divine plan, whose vast sweep includes not only our small affairs but also the interest of the universe, and made to blend into harmony, as parts of one great whole.

Meantime prayer is not futile. It brings man nearer to God; it clarifies his spiritual vision; it develops within him a sense of dependence; it leads him to find satisfaction in God himself rather than in outward things, to hide himself in his fatherly bosom until the storms of life be overpast, to trust his unknown ways for those that are known, to believe in his goodness whether he gives or denies, and confidently to anticipate the satisfaction of a perfect explanation when his love-wrought purposes have been carried to completion.

4. *Prayer as a Means of Discipline.*

"Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6. 8). The "things" referred to are temporal things—things needful for the body. These God gives or withholds as it pleaseth him, and as it profiteth us. They are not always withheld because of the insufficiency of our faith, but because a loving Father does not think it best to give them. He knows what is for our highest good; he is wiser and kinder than our prayers; he holds back that which would work injury, and gives only what is for our truest welfare.

> We, ignorant of ourselves,
> Beg often our own harms, which the wise powers
> Deny us for our good, so find we profit
> By losing of our prayers.

To which words of Shakespeare may be added those of Hannah More:

> Did not God
> Sometimes withhold in mercy what we ask,
> We should be ruined at our own request.

By the manner in which he treats their petitions the heavenly Father disciplines his children, bending them to his will, purifying their motives, strengthening their faith, developing their character, begetting within them a deeper trust, and leading them to seek the things that are most precious. His discipline is not having its most perfect work unless prayer is becoming more exclusively spiritual, and temporal things are being taken for granted. As in life so in prayer, the primacy is to be given to the spiritual, and God's kingdom and righteousness are to be sought first, and the other things left to be added or subtracted as he may deem best. It is equally encumbent that we *pray* not for the food that perisheth, as that we "*work* not for the food that perisheth." Prayer, like work, needs spiritualizing, and its quality is determined by the range of things which are habitually asked.

The mystics have been wont to speak of a ladder of prayer, which they have variously described. Adopting their figure, we might say that the first

rung on the ladder is prayer for material things; the second rung, prayer for spiritual blessings of a personal nature; the third rung, prayer for others, or intercessory prayer; the fourth rung, prayer for the realization of the will of God in all things. Some remain on the lowest rung; others get a step or two higher; only a few plant their feet on the topmost rung. Souls in which the true spirit of prayer is born have aspirations after the higher things, and their ascent may be measured by the development of their prayer life.

Happily, God looks beneath the surface of our prayers, and, distinguishing the things that we most deeply desire from those for which we childishly clamor, he sifts our prayers, separating our *needs* from our *wants,* always granting the former, often denying the latter. A foolish parent who has no lofty ideals for his child may give him whatever he asks; a wise parent who considers the highest welfare of his child will often be under the necessity of crossing his will, causing him bitter disappointment; but such disappointment may prove the medicine of his soul, purging it from all self-seeking, and leading him to see and appreciate the higher ends of life. So it is with the heavenly Father. He is always moved by the request of his child for the supply of any want, or the removal of any trial; and it pains him not to be able to grant it; but his disappointed child may live to thank him for denying his request, and may yet come to see that his prayer was not in vain, inasmuch as it

brought him into sweet accord with the gracious purpose which the All Wise was seeking to work out in his life. In view, therefore, of the liability to err in judgment, and to ask amiss, it is ever right and meet to pray,

> "The good unasked, O Father grant;
> The ill, though asked, deny."

What is looked upon as unanswered prayer may simply be prayer whose answer has been necessarily delayed. Things are still in the making, and it may take a long time for God to work out certain results. Some things ripen slowly; but many, in their haste, would fain pluck the fruit while it is yet green. They grow impatient when the thing asked for does not arrive at once. But it may be on the way; if it is in God's plan, it will surely come; if not in his plan, who would want it?

The answer to prayer often comes in a different form, and always in a better form, from that in which it was expected to come. God is always better to us than our prayers. He sometimes denies our prayer in the letter that he may answer it in the spirit. His real answer is often hidden, often misunderstood. In many instances it is not till long afterward that its significance begins to dawn upon us; and then we are glad that the door did not open, that the burden was not removed, that the specific favor sought was not given. With anointed eyes we see that some better thing was reserved for us than that which we insisted upon

getting. Professor Drummond well illustrates this point in the story of a little girl, who, when crossing the ocean, dropped her doll over the side of the ship. She went to the captain and begged him to stop the ship that she might recover it. When he refused her request she thought him hard and cruel. Sometime afterward a man fell overboard and the great engine, which had been ceaselessly at work since the voyage began, stopped. A boat was lowered, and a life was saved. When the vessel reached the harbor the first thing the captain did was to buy that little girl the most beautiful doll in all the city—and yet he would not stop the ship for her. So in life's voyage the Captain does not always interfere with the natural order of events; he does not always stop the ship to secure our doll. He knows what every case demands, and if he does not grant our specific request, it is because he has designed to give us something transcendently better.

5. *Baffled Prayers.*

"Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee" (Mark 14. 36). "And when he drew nigh, he saw the city and wept over it" (Luke 19. 41). We have bracketed these two texts together because they both imply the limitations of prayer. In the one, prayer is limited by divine purpose; in the other it is limited by the opposition of the will of the creature to the will of God. To the Father "all things are possible," but not all things absolutely. He cannot do anything that implies a contradiction;

he cannot do anything that is morally wrong; he cannot do anything that conflicts with his ultimate purpose. On the latter ground it was impossible for him to remove the cup of suffering from his praying Son. Here it was impossible to give him the desire of his heart because man could not be coerced into goodness. In the face of his foiled desire and foiled effort, Jesus wept. His heart was broken. The significant thing about his tears was that they were shed over a city in which he had labored and for which he had prayed, a city nearing its doom because his labors for it and his prayers for it had been baffled. Within the physical sphere his power was unlimited and irresistible. Nothing could stand before it. Those who witnessed his power over nature exclaimed, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" Within the moral sphere his power was limited and resistible. He could not force the free nature of man; all he could do was to persuade. The sea obeyed, but man disobeyed; the winds were hushed to rest at his word, but the rebellious will of man could not be subdued. He did not leave the world as he wanted to leave it, and he wept at his discomfiture.

And if the labors and prayers of the Master were nullified by man's resistance of moral influence, need we wonder when the same thing happens to us? To ignore the relation of human freedom to prayer is to open the way to heart-aching disappointment, and to the possibility of the wreck of

faith. The case is frequently cited of Monica praying for years for her son Augustine, and of her going in her despair to Ambrose, who comforted her with the words, "Woman, go in peace; the child of such prayers cannot perish." Was the good archbishop justified in making such an unqualified declaration? Assuredly not. All that he was warranted in saying was, that it was not likely that a child of such prayers would perish. Monica had the great satisfaction of seeing her son converted and consecrating his rare powers to the service of the church; but suppose she had died without this sight, as many godly mothers have done before and since, would nothing have come from her prayers? Would they have been offered up in vain?

Is prayer for the conversion of others infallibly answered? In a true sense it is. It is answered to the extent of securing on behalf of those prayed for power sufficient unto conversion; but that it is not always answered to the extent of realizing conversion goes without the saying. To answer such prayers infallibly would mean that God would bear down upon man, forcing him to yield. And, apparently, that is what many expect him to do in answer to their prayers for others. They look upon the issue as a matter of strength between God and the resisting soul; and so they conclude that in the end the less powerful must surrender. Such a view shows a lack of proper respect for the sanctities of the soul which God has made in his own image. To ask him to do violence to man's free nature is

to ask him to do despite to the work of his own hands.

The only power which God can exert upon a moral being is suasive. Goodness cannot conquer by compulsion. Man cannot be *made* willing. Mere omnipotence may sweep all outward opposition before it, like a cyclone, but divine moral power must wait upon man's choice, and can conquer only by securing it. And prayer, as a power working within the sphere of moral influence, is not an appeal to God's omnipotence, but to the moral power that he is able to exert over his children.

That something is done in every instance in answer to prayer for the conversion of others, there is no room whatever to doubt. The child who is prayed for has certainly an advantage over other children. A barrier has been placed in the way of his self-destruction; a powerful influence has been set in motion to lead him into the upward path. How much is done we never can know, for the inner sanctuary of another's soul is something which is kept closed from mortal view. There are secret, mysterious movements upon the spirit of man which are beyond our power to trace, and of which there is often no outward sign. We have to take God's interest and activity upon trust, never doubting that something goes out from him into others in answer to prayer—something that is helpful, something that restrains from wrongdoing and constrains to rightdoing, something powerfully affecting the will although never overpowering it. No prayer offered

up by one human soul on behalf of another human soul is ever lost.

Many parents who have prayed unceasingly for the conversion of a wayward child die without seeing any result to their praying. Were their prayers unanswered? A thousand times *No!* Every prayer brought to bear on their loved one some measure of saving influence. In all their weary waiting they entered into sympathy with the sorrowing God, and he with them. Their hearts beat in unison with his. They accomplished much, even if the ultimate end was not gained. The wall of opposition was weakened, and at any time it may yet give way. The God whose co-partners they were is not yet through with their child—never will be through with him so long as he refuses to yield in free surrender to the power of his all-redeeming, all-conquering love.

6. *Untapped Resources.*

"Thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26. 53). Jesus as a praying man felt that behind him were the boundless resources of the invisible realm. But in this instance he would not call upon them; he would do nothing for mere display or for temporary success —nothing that would produce the impression that he was depending for the triumph of his kingdom upon other than spiritual forces. He showed a reserve, and a hiding of power suggestive of Deity.

This declaration of his was called forth by the

impulsive action of Peter, who, in defending him from the rabble led by Judas, flourished his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Jesus told him to return his sword into its scabbard, because a kingdom which was not of this world had no use for such carnal weapons. And as for deliverance from the present peril, he could pray to the Father and he would instantly order to his side a host of angelic defenders who could annihilate the traitor and his band. However, he would not seek the help of men nor of angels, not because of his forbearance and resignation, but because he had confidence in God, and had sublime faith touching his kingdom. He would not weaken the power of his appeal by depending upon worldly or occult forces. His weapons were to be spiritual, and his kingdom was to consist in his rule over souls freely surrendered to his sway.

Here is a lesson for the church as the appointed agent through which the Kingdom is to come. She is not to depend for success upon outside forces. She is not to draw too eagerly or too largely upon those things that can give her only temporary and spectacular triumphs. Such triumphs may be bought too dear. Jesus saw how prone his people would be, in view of the slow and painful evolution of his kingdom, to lose faith in the potency of spiritual forces, and to indulge the hope that some outward display of power or glory might do more to bring about the final triumph of the Kingdom than the moral power lodged in the cross is capable of ac-

complishing. To save them from descending to that low plane he refused to summon heaven's reserves to his aid in the hour of his greatest weakness and need.

The reason why Jesus did not summon his celestial allies was because he had God, and he wanted his restraint to show that in God he had all that was necessary. What he had we have. To every praying soul the resources of the spiritual world, upon which he must ultimately fall back, are open. Here is something of which no one has a monopoly. The fountain of life and power in God is available to all alike. The measure of its greatness is beyond our utmost thought. What God can do for us we have never really tested. What he has done for us is nothing compared to what he is able to do. His reserve power is greater than anything we can ever know. We soon get to the end of man; we can never get to the end of God,

> "Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways:
> And how small a whisper do we hear of him!
> But the thunder of his power who can understand?"
> (Job 26. 14.)

As a father holds all his possessions for his children, so all that God has is held for us. He throws open the doors of his treasure house, saying, "All that is mine is thine." He keeps everything ready and sends our supplies in answer to the cry of faith, and the call of necessity. Nothing is too hard for him to do for us. To distrust his resources is to dishonor his name.

7. The Absoluteness of the Spiritual.

"All things whatsoever" (Matt. 21. 22). These words, like all the universals of prayer, have been taken as a blank schedule which we are permitted to fill up to suit our need, with no restriction whatever put upon our desires; or as a check drawn upon the Bank of Heaven which God will honor, for any amount, whensoever it is presented. They have been interpreted so as to give a literal and mechanical presentation of a spiritual truth, and by ignoring the proviso, which always underlies the most absolute promises, have pressed a precious truth beyond the limit of possible verification in experience. What, then, is to be done to make this promise tally with experience? Must we pare it down because it is in itself too large? By no means! What we must do is to reinterpret it, so as to make it harmonize with the facts of experience.

The difference must never be overlooked between God's treatment of prayer for temporal and for spiritual blessings. Temporal blessings are never promised by him absolutely; spiritual blessings are. He may have good and valid reasons for withholding the one; he can have no possible motive or interest in withholding the other. The material is always relative; the spiritual is absolute. Hence the absoluteness that belongs to prayer relates to the spiritual, and to the spiritual alone.

An enlightened Christian will never, therefore,

ask for any temporal blessing without conditions. If his prayer is directed to the securing of some material benefit, it will be for the purpose of working out some spiritual end. If he prays for health, he will desire that it may be given only, provided that it will make for his highest good, by his healed body becoming the servant of a renewed soul; if he asks for wealth, he will ask for it only on the ground that its bestowment will not be hurtful to himself or to others, or stand in the way of a greater blessing. When used for spiritual ends, and only when so used, are material things in their proper place in the divine scheme of life; and only when *meant* to be so used are they legitimate objects for request in prayer. In spiritual ends material interests are to be swallowed up and lost. Many who shrink from prayer which takes the form of supplication for material advantages would have all their misgivings set to rest if only they recognized the fact that the material is subsidiary to the spiritual; that, while it is true that God's concern for man includes his physical welfare, "it belongs to his essentially moral nature," as Canon Liddon has said, "to give the precedence to the least moral interests over the highest material interests."

There are things which God exalts above our temporal interests; there are things which he desires more than our health or happiness, or worldly prosperity. With him outward things are never supreme or absolute. It is only when we rise into the spiritual realm that we come into a circle of

things where all limitations fall away, and man touches the Infinite and the Eternal. Within that sphere prayer never returns void.

When a poverty-stricken soul prays for the fullness of the Spirit; when a feeble soul prays for greater power for better service; when a care-tossed soul prays for rest; when a sorrowing soul prays for comfort; when a darkened soul prays for light; when a restive soul prays for patience, or a beaten soul prays for victory, they all pray for things absolutely in harmony with God's will and desire. He can have no interest whatever in keeping back any of these blessings for a single moment. Being to their advantage, they are always given when sought.

It is in the spiritual rather than in the material world that prayer has its chief sphere of action. The benefits which it brings are generally subjective rather than objective. They are not things which can be seen and handled. They are spiritual treasures, and constitute the white stone, the significance of which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it. Answers to prayer are often matters of personal conviction and experience. The praying soul sees God's hand where others do not. Although he has no demonstrable proof to give, he is convinced that God has heard and helped him. When "in the lower sphere, where men ask temporal blessings and where God works by visible agents," there is often bitter disappointment; but when it is sought in the higher sphere in which he

works by direct action upon the soul, disappointment is impossible; for the final ends of prayer being moral, anyone who in praying rises to the spiritual sphere, asking only for spiritual blessings, may be fully assured that his prayer has entered into the divine will, and that holding it there, while faithfully supplying the prescribed conditions, all that he desires shall find abundant fulfillment.

8. *A Wrong Conception of Prayer.*

"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. 11. 12). These words have generally been taken to support the idea that man is to keep "battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayer" until God capitulates and gives him what he asks. Nothing could be further from the Lord's thought.

To understand the meaning of these words we must look at them in their contextual setting. The brief and stirring ministry of John had inaugurated a popular movement in favor of Jesus. The people were aflame with enthusiasm, having transferred to him all their Messianic hopes. They expected that any day he might assert his royal prerogatives and set up his kingdom. They stood prepared to flock around his standard, and acclaim him their king. But as the days passed they became impatient. They could see no reason why he should longer refuse to declare himself. Further delay they could not brook, and in the heat of their impatience they wished to bring things to a crisis at once. Failing

to understand the nature of the kingdom which he had come to establish, they thought that it could be taken by violence. Afterward when they caught a glimpse of its real character they sought to destroy it by violence; and instead of seeking to take him by force and make him a king, they cried, "Away with him! Crucify him!"

The violence referred to in our text is not, therefore, something to be commended, but something to be condemned; not something which we are to follow, but something which we are to shun. It is resorted to only by blind and misguided zealots who discard the power of truth. So, instead of exclaiming with Ambrose, "O blessed violence!" we should, rather, exclaim, "O unseemly violence!"

Nor is the kingdom of heaven to be taken by violence in the sense understood by those who cling to the conventional interpretation of the text. It is an entire perversion of our Saviour's teaching that leads anyone to think that God is tardy, that he gives grudgingly, that much strenuous conflict with him is needed to wring a reluctant blessing from his hand. It is difficult to see how such a conception of God could have prevailed. Jesus taught the willingness of God, and encouraged men to believe that he is more ready to give than they are to receive; that prayers and tears are not required to move his heart, and turn him to his children, and that they have no need to storm his strong castle, because its gates instead of being barred are forever open. As Archbishop Trench aptly remarks,

"We must not conceive of prayer as an overcoming of God's reluctance, but as a laying hold of his highest willingness." The case of Jacob is often referred to as an illustration of overcoming God by strong insistence, but all that the self-willed Jacob got by his wrestling with God was a shrunken sinew and lifelong lameness. It was only when he ceased to wrestle and clung in weakness that he became the prince of God and prevailed. Not as the conqueror of God, but as the conquered of God; not as a victorious warrior, but as a trustful child, does anyone enter the Kingdom of promise.

But while God does not require our urgent entreaty to exhort favor from his hand, we need the prolonged exercise of prayer to deepen our interest, and to bring us into a condition in which God can bless us and use us. Says William Law, "If God does not give to us at our first asking, if he only gives to those who are importunate, it is not because our prayers make any change in him, but because our importunity has made a change in ourselves, and rendered us proper objects of God's gifts and graces."

Wrestling is indeed needed, but it is to be with ourselves and not with God. We need many a tussle with our wayward hearts to crush the impulses of the flesh, and to put down the rising of selfishness and vainglory. We need much "holy wrestling in the night" with our too reluctant wills to overcome our natural obduracy and deadness, and to bring our motives and deeds into the light

of the Divine Presence, and ourselves into complete surrender to the divine will. The moment that condition is reached the flood gates of divine grace are opened and the full tide of heavenly blessing flows into the praying heart, and thence out of that heart into the life of the world.

What of those saints who spend much time in vigils and in soul-travail? Are they to be our models? Take, for example, Whitefield, who spent whole days and weeks prostrate on the ground in silent and vocal prayer; or John Foster, who used to spend long nights in his chapel, "absorbed in spiritual exercises," pacing to and fro in the disquietude of his spirit, until his restless feet had worn a little track in the isle; or of David Brainerd, whose anguish upon occasions was so great that he said, "My joints were loosed; the sweat ran down my face and body as if it would dissolve." Are experiences such as these normal and healthy-minded? We think not. Gladly do we turn from them to the sane and wholesome view of Spurgeon, who, when told of a Christian friend, who had spent three hours upon his knees pleading with God for a certain blessing, remarked: "I could not do it, even if my eternity depended upon it. Besides, if I go to the bank with a check, what do I wait loafing around the premises for when I have got my money? The fact is, long prayers are often the result of unbelief."

The attitude toward God which these morbid and highly wrought experiences imply is essentially un-

christian. It is far removed from the high ground of privilege which the Christian ought to occupy. It is an attitude which is possible only when Old Testament ideas regarding prayer have been projected into the present. The New Testament brings us into a totally different atmosphere. We are to pray to a loving Father, with whom it is not hard to gain an audience. The declaration, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself," is not a Christian conception. Does a father hide himself from his child? And when found is he hard to persuade? Where the Old Testament saints saw a cloud on God's face New Testament saints see a smile. While the Old Testament saints prayed long in uncertainty and agony, the New Testament saints linger in the Father's presence because they delight in his fellowship. In the joy of communion the flight of time is forgotten, and instead of waiting patiently *for* the Lord, with a certainty sweet and comforting they wait unweariedly *upon* him.

9. *God's Desire for Our Prayers.*

"While he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him much" (Luke 15. 20).

These words present a picture of the warmth of welcome which man receives when he comes to God, to pour out his heart in penitence at his feet. The returning son may hold back; the Father runs. The impulse of the son to return may be new and sudden; the Father's heart has all the time been

breaking on account of his absence. He has never ceased to yearn for his home-coming; he desires his fellowship; he longs to hear his voice; he takes the initiative, seeking before he is sought; his arms are open to receive him in whatever degree of shame and degradation he may return.

How seldom is the desire of the heavenly Father that we come to him, and talk with him in prayer, considered as it ought to be! What a stimulus to prayer it furnishes! In the hour when the consciousness of sin has brought a dreary sense of separation, and the heart is numb with pain, how it would lift us out of our apathy and awaken within us the impulse to pray were we to remember that if there is no desire on our part to draw nigh to God, God has a strong desire for us to come to him. When we have no desire to pray all the more need is there that we should pray. If we have nothing else to say, let us tell God of our want of desire; let us talk to him about our coldness and hardness of heart, and before we know it we will have begun to speak to him, and will have a realizing sense of his sympathy with us in the desolation of our estrangement. The most broken and fragmentary prayer is pleasing to him. He loves to have us lisp our desires into his ears; he loves to have us tell him all our troubles, all our hopes, all our plans. There is nothing that concerns us that does not form a legitimate subject for prayer.

In cases of extreme suffering or nervous debility,

when one is too weak to pray, when the mind cannot take hold of God, when his face seems hid and the whole spiritual world is a blank, when leaden wings keep the soul from soaring, and words will not come, what can we do but fall back upon the reality of his presence, and trust in him in the dark? Much as he wants our prayers, he wants *us* still more; and he would like to see us as patient with ourselves as he is with us. The wish to pray is in itself a prayer, and is pleasing to him. When we are too weak even to think about him he will do our thinking for us. And when in utter helplessness we sink into his arms the clouds of doubt will scatter and there will come the glad surprise of knowing that he is never nearer than when we think of him as far away.

If it is a heart-breaking sorrow to a mother when her daughter does not give her her confidence, but goes to others with her troubles or her happy secrets, how unspeakable must God's sorrow be when any child of his turns away from him, and shuts him out of his life! For the confidence of his children he yearns with measureless affection; hailing with delight the first sign of interest, the first look of recognition, the first flutter of returning love. Never does a fond parent listen with greater delight to the prattling of his babe than the heavenly Father listens to the feeblest accents of prayer from the lips of his child. No sweeter sound ever falls upon his ears than the prayer of his new-born child. A dumb child is to

the heavenly Father as grievous a disappointment as it is to the earthly parent. How his heart must thrill with joy when the dumb begins to speak! "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, 'My Father'?" is a question which he is ever pressing home to our hearts. He misses any single voice from the stream of prayer that rises to his throne; and he will not be satisfied until intercourse is established between himself and every one of his self-exiled children.

One of the chief encouragements to prayer is found in the invitations to draw near to God scattered so plentifully through the pages of Scripture. Accompanying the outward call in the word is the inward call of the Spirit in the heart. From the former men can close their eyes and ears; from the latter it is not so easy to escape. The Spirit of God often awakens a sudden impulse to pray; earth-bound souls look up, knees grown stiff humbly bend, and the soul, impelled by a sense of need, finds its way to the source of help, and there is heard the answering cry of the child to the Father.

For this filial response to the outgoing of his fatherly love God ever waits. When it is said that the disciples waited ten days on God at Pentecost it might be said with equal truthfulness that God waited ten days upon them. They did not need to wait until God was ready to send the gift of the Spirit; he had to wait until they were ready to receive it. Whenever a soul turns to God the light of his countenance falls upon him, just as the light of

the sun falls upon the face of an uplifted flower. The blessing received to-day in answer to prayer might have been received long ago if only we had opened our hearts as freely to God then as now. He ever waits upon us that he may be gracious; stilling the hearts of the angel bands to hear our faintest cry; and when he catches the first far-away note of penitential confession he rejoices as one who has found his own.

10. *The Smallest Social Denominator.*

"If two of you should agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18. 19, 20). *Two* is the smallest social denominator. It stands for the first step out of individualism into collectivism. It is the beginning, the germ, of the social life. When two people unite in prayer, the social life which inheres in Christianity has begun to function, and the nucleus of a church has been already formed.

If two shall agree, or *symphonize;* if they come into secret accord; if their spirits are harmonized so that they strike the same note, anything that they shall ask of heaven is theirs. The joint supplication of two who are in agreement has a special promise annexed to it and secures a special blessing. But in this symphony of united prayer is included more than two according human wills. It includes

also the blending of these according human wills with the will of God, for it is the Holy Spirit that has brought them into accord, and their union being in the Spirit brings them into attunement with the Infinite.

The tendency to-day is toward cooperation. To accomplish any great undertaking it is necessary to federate all the forces at command. The growth of the social spirit is surely preparing the way for the recognition of prayer as a working force in social life, but thus far the social value of prayer has been but faintly appreciated. It is safe to say that the great religious movements of the future will put a higher estimate upon prayer as a social force, and will endeavor to match united effort with united prayer. They will function toward union in prayer in new ways and under new forms. Meanwhile let not the day of small things be despised; for if but two shall agree at the throne of grace touching things of common interest, a beginning is made toward the larger union which is sure to come.

The absoluteness of the word "anything" must, of course, be qualified by the proviso—anything in accordance with his name and will. Whatever two believers, who are in accord with one another, and with the divine will, ask, it shall be done, for what they ask can only be for their own highest good, for the highest good of others, and for the glory of God.

The reason given why such prayer will find com-

plete fulfillment is suggestive: "*For* where two or three meet together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Observe, it is not said, "There I shall be," but, "There *I am*." Jesus does not merely join himself to those who come together in his name; he arrives first at the place of tryst, and is there to welcome them. How wrong is it then to pray for him to come! His presence is always to be counted upon as one of every praying band. Strictly speaking, his words are not a promise at all, but the declaration of a fact. And since, whenever and wherever his people meet he is in the midst, it behooves them not to pray for his presence, but to acknowledge it and rejoice in it.

The presence of Christ in the midst of his people is in itself the pledge of the fulfillment of every hope. To the eye of men they may seem to be a feeble folk, but with their mighty unseen Lord and Leader among them, and for them, they are invincible. Praying in his name, in which they have come together, praying to him as present, praying to him as their risen, living, triumphant Lord, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead, and through whom divine power is mediated, they find themselves in the presence of one who can fill their minds with wisdom, and their hearts with comfort and strength, because to him omnipotence belongs.

11. *A Missionary Prayer.*

"Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest"

(Luke 10. 2; Matt. 9. 38). "Pray ye *therefore*," namely, "because the harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few." Look *around* upon the whitening fields, then look *up* to the Lord of the harvest, who sent the Sower, and beseech him to send forth laborers to gather in the ripening grain. Do not ask him to send *for* laborers, but to send them forth from those already here. The opportunities of the hour call to prayer. They cannot be met without it. Opportunity involves responsibility. If there is a chance to reap, it is our duty to reap. Those who are themselves busy in the harvest field are the first to recognize the utter inadequacy of available resources. They see the greatness of the work; they feel its urgency, and so they pause in the midst of their toil to pray for reenforcements.

The need for workers was never greater than it is to-day. If the number of workers has multiplied since Christ's time, the field has also widened, and the disproportion is still very great. In the home field there are many waste places unreclaimed. The cities grow with great rapidity, and as they grow the problem of the "submerged tenth" becomes more acute. Despite our wonderful achievements in the foreign field, there is still only one missionary to about every 100,000 of the population. At the same time by an unwise overlapping of agencies, and multiplication of churches, we have too many workers in some places, while there are too few in others. An intelligent participation in this prayer

would bring to an end all that wicked waste of power.

Does some one plead for delay because it is now the seed time? To the eye of faith seed time and harvest blend into one. It is always the spiritual harvest time. Results are to be expected from the time the seed is dropped into the ground. In the Lord's harvest field the plowman overtakes the reaper. Hence the need of urgency. There is grain to be reaped to-day, which, if neglected, will rot in the field. Therefore, let every one lift up his eyes and see the work that awaits him. Harvest fields are within his reach ready for the sickle. And while he is doing his own bit of reaping, realizing how pitifully inadequate is the supply of workers, he will be led to pray that the One in whose hands are the hearts of self-surrendered souls may send forth a sufficiency of helpers to compass the work.

The expression "send forth" may be more forcefully rendered "thrust forth," the meaning of the request being that they be thrust forth from their places of ease. They are not, however, to be thrust forth by the compelling power of an irresistible hand, but by the impelling power of a newly awakened conviction of urgency. The rendering of Meyer, "force them out," is too strong. God does not force anyone into his service. Every recruit is a volunteer. The most that we are to pray for is that men may be pushed out into the harvest field by the urge of a heaven-born passion.

But why ask God to do this? Certainly, not to interest him in the work, but, rather, to get ourselves into sympathy with him regarding the work. He is desirous to see the ripe grain reaped—to see prepared souls harvested and brought into his garner. He needs more harvest hands, and when we ask him to send them we simply enter into his desire that they may be sent. Our prayer thus unites us with him in the accomplishment of the very thing upon which his heart is set.

But praying that others may be sent is vain unless the one who prays puts himself within the circle of his own request, and is willing to go if he should be called. When Isaiah heard the voice of Jehovah saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" he did not point to some other man, saying, "Send him," but he answered, "Here am I; send me." For some who already feel the outthrust of a divine impulse this prayer may mean the proffer of self. And while there is no need for anyone to run before he is sent, everyone should see to it that he runs when he is sent.

12. *Prayer as Related to the Immanence of God.*

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4. 24). Jesus here clearly intimates that a new day in the religious development of the race had dawned—that the time had come when worship was to be a thing of the spirit rather than a thing of external forms. He assumes that the day of ceremonial

religion, the day when religion should consist in rituals and shrines and altars, is past; that henceforth worship was not to be limited to temples made with hands; that the door into the holy place was no longer to be opened only by priestly hands that kept the keys; that not alone in certain sacred spots were men to worship the Father, but that the spiritual age having arrived he was to be worshiped anywhere, being near to all alike, and being accessible to all alike.

The expression "God is a Spirit" is more correctly rendered "God is spirit"; and so it reads in the margin of the Revised Version. As spirit, he is invisible to the eye, impalpable to the senses, is seen only by the eye of faith, and heard directly only by his still small voice within the inner chambers of the soul. This lack of outward impression, of audible communication, and of "a definite response such as a person feels when he gets into relation with the outward world, or to another person," is for many a prime difficulty in connection with prayer. When we commune with God we see nothing and hear nothing; the room in which we pray is apparently still and empty; yet the very fact that we do pray implies that we have a belief in an unseen Presence, even if our awareness of it be absent. And in this we are wise, for in the spiritual, as well as in the natural sphere, the final forces, while never merely passive, but always active, and always seeking to make themselves felt, seldom come within the range of consciousness. As

President H. C. King has pointed out, "The constant pressure of the air, the motion of the earth, we do not feel at all. We have no sensible knowledge of any kind of the existence of nature's atoms. The ether vibrations are quite beyond the reach of any sense." Thus in both spheres alike we have to walk by faith rather than by sense and sensation.

Because God is spirit "they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth": in spirit, "not as opposed to form, but as opposed to *mere* form"; in truth, not as opposed to outward expression, but as opposed to insincerity and unreality. According to Lyman Abbott, "Christ's language condemns the spirit of ritualism but not the employment of rites." It makes true worship a spiritual exercise, a thing "of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2. 29).

The expression "God is spirit" must not, however, be watered down to mean that he is an abstract principle or impersonal force, to be called by such vague names as "The All" or "The Absolute." He is a *living* Spirit, a *loving* Spirit; a *fatherly* Spirit with whom man can hold conscious fellowship. Yea, more, he is "the Father of spirits" to whom every man is kin; immanent in the life of the world, yet distinct from it, within it yet above it, at once the Universal Life and the Universal Father; one whose love is real, warm, and personal, one with whom the spirit of man can meet, and hold personal fellowship.

And when the human spirit meets the Infinite Spirit both come to their own.

The conception of God as immanent in the world, which Jesus here gives us, helps to bring him near, and make him accessible. The God who is immanent does not need to come down to meet us. He dwells in the world. His presence pervades every part of it. He is its indwelling life. The movement of his vital energy is seen in every form of sentient activity; the throb of his infinite heart is felt in every pulsation of animal and human love. The reason why he can always be found is because he is perpetually near. Those only fail to find him who turn away from him. As another has said, "No place is God-forsaken, except the place where man forsakes his God."

13. *A New Epoch in the Prayer Life.*

"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, that will I do" (John 14. 13, 14). "And in that day ye shall ask me no question. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name. . . . Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be made full" (John 16. 23, 24). See also John 15. 16; 16. 26.

The formula, "In Christ's name," or its equivalent, "for his sake," with which almost every prayer is ended, is too often used as a sort of talisman. Rightly understood, it reveals a new revelation with

Christ, a new method of approach to God; or—shall we say?—a new way of praying. Of this high privilege of praying in Christ's name the Old Testament saints knew nothing. It is a privilege belonging to the new dispensation. How had the disciples prayed before this time? Like all other pious Jews, they had prayed in the name of Jehovah. Their plea had been "For thy name's sake, O Lord, hear my prayer" (see Psalms 25. 11 to 31. 3; 119. 21). "Henceforth" they were to use a new name—the name of Jesus. This they could not do until after his death and resurrection. While he was with them they went to the Father directly; after his departure they were to go to the Father in his name." "Hitherto," said he, "ye have asked nothing in my name." Henceforth they were to ask everything in his name. In his name they were to approach the Father; in his name they were to offer every prayer.

To pray in Christ's name is to do more than hide behind him; pleading his merits, adding his plea to ours. The thought is to be forever excluded from our minds that Christ is more our friend than the Father, and that through him we are to get a favorable introduction to the Father before he can be won over to our side and answer our prayers. To pray in Christ's name is to stand in his place; to pray as he prayed, as sons to a Father, and not as creatures to a creator; it is to be one with him in thought and desire; to speak as his representative, and to occupy the position before God that he

occupied. The term "name" stands in Scripture for the person whom it describes; hence to pray in the name of Christ is to share with him the glory of his throne-power. Says Andrew Murray, "When I go in the name of another I deny myself, I take not only his name, but himself, and what he is, instead of myself, and what I am." In like manner Dr. A. J. Gordon represents Christians as "entering into his person and appropriating his will, so that when they pray it is as if Jesus himself stood in God's presence, and made intercession." To the same effect are the words of Dr. James Denney: "To pray in the name of Christ is to present to God petitions which Jesus will present again in our name, saying 'Amen' to our prayer."

To pray in Christ's name is also to pray "in Christ's mind and spirit" (Tholuck); it is to get out of the self-life into the Christ-life; it is to be so ensphered in him that nothing is thought of, nothing is asked for, that lies outside his will, and in which he cannot share. As Dr. George B. Stevens has said, "To pray in his name is to hold all our petitions subject to the spirit of his life of supreme trust and obedience. When we thus pray we ask that all of our prayers may be as his; that they may be purged from all self-seeking, and may express the attitude of hearts which are in harmony with God's will; and our unshaken confidence in his providence and grace." When this identification of our wills with the will of Christ has been reached we become "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual

sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2. 5); and our prayers being offered in his name are accepted as his.

14. *A Twofold Condition of Prevailing Prayer.*

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15. 7). The word "if" implies an alternative. It limits the answer of prayer to those who fulfill the twofold condition which is here laid down. No one else has any reason to expect an answer to prayer. That twofold condition consists in abiding in Christ, and having his word abiding in us. The force of the Master's words evidently is, "If ye abide in me, and as a result of that abiding have my word abiding in you, your prayers shall be effectual."

Those who abide in Christ think his thoughts, get his point of view, express his desires, pray his prayers. Those in whom his word abides have their minds enlightened in the knowledge of his will; their whole being, so to speak, is saturated with his words; "their desires, their understanding, their affections, their wills all being steeped in those great truths which the Master spoke" (Alexander McLaren). By his indwelling word they are governed and directed in all their inward motions and in all their outward actions, so that they not only live and pray in him, but he lives and prays through them. When we abide in him we pray as Jesus would have prayed in our place; when his

word abides in us we pray as the mouthpiece of Jesus himself. According to both representations, the prayer offered is in such absolute oneness with the will of Christ that the Father can afford to give us what we ask.

Prayer that fulfills these conditions cuts at the root of all self-will and selfish desire. It purifies our motives and exalts our spiritual aims. If before proffering a request we were to pause and inquire, "Would Jesus have asked for this?" or, "If he could speak through me, would he ask for it?" we would be brought face to face with the acceptance or rejection of God's holy will; and it is only when his will is joyfully accepted that we have any ground for believing that at the right time, and in the right way, he will do for us whatever we ask.

Whittier remarks that "the simple heart that freely asks in love, receives." To ask in love is to ask with the *yea* of the entire soul. And this is generally a thing that is reached by gradual growth. It takes time to get into the heart and mind and will of the Divine Friend and to get his heart and mind and will into us. Such an intersphering of personalities cannot be attained without much close and intimate communion. The initial act of fellowship has to pass into fixed habit. Union with him has to become abiding with him; the planting of his word in the soil of the heart has to be followed by its rooting and fruiting before the place of power is reached where we can speak for Christ, and he can speak through us.

PART THIRD

THE PLACE OF PRAYER AMONG THE EARLY FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

CHAPTER I

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

THE book entitled The Acts of the Apostles is something more than a record of apostolic activity. In its deepest sense it is the record of the acts of the risen Christ performed by the apostles, in the power of the Holy Spirit; and not of *their* acts only, but also of the acts of the entire church, as constituting the body of Christ; for the humblest followers of Christ looked upon themselves as the agents of a higher Power, by which they were controlled and whose behests they were to carry out. With that higher Power they kept in unbroken connection through prayer.

The early church was a praying church as well as a working church; and it was a working church *because* it was a praying church. As soon as it was born it began to pray; and it grew in strength and efficiency as its prayer-life developed. Through all its subsequent history, down to the present day, it has abounded in service for the Master when it abounded in prayer, and it has declined in the service of the Master when it has declined in prayer. Its prayer-spirit has been a thermometer indicating its spiritual temperature, revealing unerringly the degree of its zeal for the things of the kingdom

and the measure of its power in fulfilling the redemptive mission to which it has specially been called. But prayer is more, much more, than an operating force lying behind the variant forms of service, inspiring and directing them; it is in itself as much a part of the work of the church as any form of outward activity.

1. *The Pentecostal Prayer Meeting.*

"These all with one accord, continued steadfastly in prayer" (Acts 1. 14). "The first meeting of the ecclesia" was a meeting for prayer. A group of enrolled disciples—one hundred and twenty in number—met in a large upper room and there tarried in prayer, dividing their time between that place of assembly and the temple. They had been charged by their risen Lord, who "showed himself alive after his passion," "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye heard from me" (Acts 1. 3, 4). They were not specifically told how to spend the time of waiting; they were simply told to wait until the time of divine fulfillment; but without needing to be instructed on the point, the attitude in which they waited was that of prayer. For ten days they kept looking heavenward, waiting and watching for the Spirit's advent. Not that they were engaged in the formal exercise of prayer during the entire time of waiting, but that they continued in the spirit of prayer, the pent-up fires bursting frequently forth in fervent supplication.

The contention has sometimes been made that the Holy Spirit was not poured out in answer to prayer, but came in fulfillment to promise as a direct, unmerited gift of God. That it came according to promise as God's unmerited gift goes without the saying, but that it came in connection with prayer, if not in direct answer to it, is equally certain. The words "they continued instantly in prayer" without doubt point out the way in which they were occupied when the blessing came. "The tree of promise dropped its fruit when shaken by the hand of prayer." And thus, as Matthew Henry rightly infers, the promise of the Father, upon which their faith was based, did not supersede prayer but quickened and encouraged it.

The manner of their prayer is distinctly set forth:

(1) *They prayed in unison,* "with one accord"—with an utter absence of discord and division. If not in mental agreement in all things, they were one in desire, one in faith, one in hope. Their spirits and their prayers melted into one like kindred drops.

(2) *They prayed with perseverance.* "They continued *steadfastly* in prayer," allowing nothing to divide their attention or their interest, or to break the chain of their petition. They held on to the promise of the Father with a confidence that never wavered.

It was in this attitude that the day of Pentecost found them. "When the day of Pentecost was

now come, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2. 1). In all probability they had spent the preceding night in prayer, and as that eventful day dawned they were still upon their knees; and while in that posture they received the Holy Spirit baptism.

The day selected for the Spirit's advent was the day of Pentecost, "the feast of harvest, the feast of the first fruits." It was the day of fulfillment, an "epoch-making day." As the disciples turned their empty hearts receptively toward heaven the promised and expected blessing came suddenly, as God's blessings often do. It came with outward signs of wind and fire, symbols of divine energy. These outward signs were tokens of an inward spiritual grace; the fire which sat upon each brow typifying the holy fire which burned within each heart. Their inward being was filled with that divine power, without which they had been forbidden to take up the work. Henceforth they were to be allied with the Infinite. Their hearts were to be the Spirit's dwelling place; by him all their activities were to be directed; clothed by him with prophetic power, they were, each in his own place and way to be his "witnesses in both Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Upon this same power the church has always had to depend in the work of saving men. And if, since the Spirit's advent, prayer is no longer needed to bring this power down from above, it is still

needed to bring the soul that negotiates between God and man into its possession.

2. A Second Pentecost.

"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4. 31). This meeting for prayer, which was held subsequent to Pentecost, had for its object the obtaining of added power for service. It was not a protracted meeting, but was held in a brief pause in the thick of the battle by those who felt the need of the Spirit's fullness. They were too well instructed to pray for the Spirit's coming; they believed that he had come never to depart. What they prayed for was a larger infilling, a deeper baptism of his life-giving power. Their prayer was like that of Xavier in a later day—"Yet more, O my God, yet more." What had been already given they sought to obtain in greater measure, by a direct act of appropriating faith. Nor did they seek in vain, for as they prayed the blessing came in a wondrous way.

The prayer they offered is the first recorded prayer of the infant church. Driven to their knees by a sense of helplessness, "they lifted up their voice to God with one accord," making their common appeal to the sovereign power of Him "who made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all that in them is." Their prayer is couched in elevated language, borrowed in part from the one

hundred and forty-sixth and twelfth Psalms. It is a remarkable prayer—instinct with the spirit of adoration, strong in its grip upon God, full of faith in his overruling providence and in the final outworking of his purposes of grace. Above all, it is a thoroughly Christian prayer, being utterly unselfish, not making request for immunity from persecution and danger, but asking for the confounding of God's enemies, for the strengthening of his kingdom, and for the impartation of needed grace to those on the firing line, that their faith might not fail, and that through them the word of the Lord might prevail.

The shaking of the place of assembly was symbolic of the movement of the higher Power to which appeal had been made. These outward manifestations were not only signs of acceptance of their prayer, and the pledge of needed help, they were also the witness of the incoming and inworking of a new power, which each one was to receive to his utmost capacity, according to the measure of his faith. A fresh communication of divine power was given to all. "They were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit"—the specialized prophetic gift of the Old Testament thus becoming the common gift of the new. Into every one of them entered a new power which enabled him to "speak the word of God with boldness," telling the story of the Christ who died and rose again with a new accent of conviction, and with a courage born of faith in its saving efficacy.

From these early days down to the present every increase of spiritual power and every revival of religion accompanying it has been preceded by prayer. A historical instance is furnished by John Wesley in his Journal, where he tells how a little group of Oxford students met for prayer, and adds "at three in the morning, as we continued instant in prayer, the Holy Ghost came mightily upon us, insomuch as overawed we fell to the ground. When we had somewhat recovered from the sense of the presence of the Majesty on High we broke out with one accord into the *Te Deum*—"We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord." From that holy place Methodism went out conquering and to conquer.

3. *Fellowship in Prayer.*

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2. 42). The first converts to Christ were not individualists. They did not remain in isolation from one another. They felt the need of the molding touch of association in order to live the highest, completest life. It is said that they "were together"—they lived together, they planned together, they prayed together, they worked together. They were of one heart and mind and aim. They were possessors of a common spiritual life and participants in a common spiritual service. Their fellowship was in the things of the spirit, the things that are deepest and closest. In the

best sense of the term they practiced close communion.

Four things were characteristic of their simple communal life:

(1) *They continued as they had begun in the apostolic teaching,* sitting at the apostles' feet, and being instructed in the deeper things of the kingdom of God.

(2) *"They continued in the apostles' fellowship,"* participating with them in the worship of God and the service of man.

(3) *They continued in "the breaking of bread";* that is, in the breaking together of the holy sacramental bread by which their souls were nourished.

(4) *They continued "in prayer,"* or, more correctly, "in the prayers"—the use of the plural form indicating the fullness of their prayer life. It is a grievous mistake to render the words "they continued in the prayer," and to interpret them as meaning that they continued repeating the Lord's Prayer every time they met (So Dr. David Smith). Their prayers were not things of set form but were the spontaneous outflowing of overbrimming hearts.

In this common life of fellowship prayer was perhaps the most marked feature. They enjoyed together oft-recurring seasons of prayer, during which the enveloping fire of the Holy Spirit fused their hearts into one. In many respects they were a heterogeneous company. They differed in race, in language, and in previous religious training. Had they dwelt upon outward or non-essential things in

religion, they would have fallen apart. Their union was a thing of the spirit, and one of the chief means of promoting it was prayer. Those who pray together, who are burdened with the same desires, and who unite in asking the same things, are brought into the closest fellowship. There is no more powerful social solvent than prayer. When men bow their knees to the same Father all their outward differences melt away, all their estrangements cease, and they are led to dwell together and to walk together in unity. Whenever the experience of the early, undivided church is repeated, and the people of God are united in the fellowship of prayer, the saving power of God's right hand is manifested, and the Lord adds to them day by day those that are being saved (see Acts 2. 47, R. V.).

4. *Making a Business of Prayer.*

"But we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word" (Acts 6. 4). The time had come when a subdivision of labor had to be made; for the more complex life becomes, the more has labor to be divided. The first of the growing demands of that primitive religious society was the appointing of a new class of officers to look after the temporalities of the church, especially the daily ministrations to the poor, in order that the twelve might be kept free to give themselves up entirely to the spiritual interests of the church, namely, to prayer and teaching. Seven good men having been chosen, they were set before the apostles, who,

"when they had prayed," laid their hands upon them, consecrating them to the work. This solemn act of ordination, now performed for the first time, had its analogue in the Jewish ritual, where the laying on of the hands was believed to convey peculiar benefits to those entering upon office. From a purely psychological point of view, the laying on of the hands of praying men upon the heads of those who are being set apart to some distinctive work implies such a concentration of energy as to constitute a battery of psychic force; from a religious point of view it has added significance in that it connects the sensitive self-surrendered soul with the original source of power, bringing into him a stream of divine recreative energy. It is an act in which the human and the divine blend, the touch of the hand being accompanied with the touch of God.

In the present day there are those who are called off from the outward activities of life to its more spiritual activities as truly as were the apostles. A great host are called to the work of teaching; why should not some be called to the work of prayer? That some are so called does not admit of doubt. "There is such a thing," says Herrmann, "as elect souls, here and there, being called apart from the life of action and intercourse to a life of prayer and contemplation, as truly vicarious and altruistic as a life of philanthropy; for these are they who can say, 'For their sakes I sanctify myself.'"

Sometimes physical infirmities and limitations, by shutting certain people out of life's busy scenes, constitute a divine ordainment to this form of service, which a Jewish sage describes as "the service of the heart"; but oftener the order comes as an inward call, which those who hear should hasten to obey, joyfully foregoing all the prizes of earth, that they may occupy the humble places, and take up inconspicuous work, saying, "To this will we give ourselves in the Master's name, working out of sight, remaining unknown and unpraised, hiding ourselves in the lives of others as the leaven is hidden in the meal, that by losing our lives we may save them."

It is worthy of note that of the twelve apostles who gave themselves up to this general spiritual ministry only the few who took up the more spectacular work of missionary evangelists receive any mention from the chronicler of the Acts of the Apostles. Yet, who shall say that the influence of those who prayed and labored in secret was any less potent than the influence of those who performed heroic deeds in the light of appreciative publicity?

In this twofold ministry prayer may have been mentioned first, not merely because it is an aid to work, or because it is in itself a form of work, but because it is the one part of the spiritual ministry of the church which is most apt to be neglected. Prayer is in itself just as distinct and definite a way of influencing others as teaching, but

because it deals with intangible forces its real value is apt to be overlooked. Those who specialize on prayer are in efficiency of service no whit behind those who specialize on teaching. The two forms of ministry will always go hand in hand. Those who pray will minister along the line of their prayers, and those who teach along the line of their teaching; and those who teach will pray, and those who work in prayer will work in every other direction that may open to them.

5. *Praying to Jesus.*

"They stoned Stephen, calling upon the Lord" (Acts 7. 59). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, in dying prayed to Jesus. In doing so he used the same form of prayer which Jesus himself had used upon the cross. His words, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," show conclusively that he looked upon his risen Lord as one who had divine power, and hence as one in whose keeping his spirit would be eternally safe.

According to the testimony of Pliny, the early Christians "were accustomed to sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ and to God." They doubtless *prayed* to him also as to God. Having been wont to ask his guidance and help when he was with them in the flesh, they continued to do so when he departed from them into another sphere. They never seemed to have imagined that his death could make any difference whatever in his relation to them. They believed him to be

alive, although withdrawn from sight; they believed that he had ascended to the place of power at God's right hand, and hence was more able than ever to aid them in every emergency. That they should continue to maintain the old attitude of dependence upon him was the most natural thing in the world.

The expression "calling upon the name of the Lord," which frequently occurs in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the epistles, always means calling upon Christ—for to Christ the term *Kurios* uniformly refers. The salutation of Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthian church, includes "all that call upon the name of the Lord in every place." Upon that name the early Christians called in every circumstance, never doubting that it was a name of supreme power. While very little direct reference is made in the New Testament to the offering of prayer to Jesus, the inferential significance of the expression "calling upon the name of the Lord" seems to imply that this was a prevailing attitude. Throughout the Christian centuries prayer has been made to him continually. To the Christian's consciousness he has had all the value of God. He has been to many the spirit's resting place, beyond which they have never thought of going; yet Jesus never taught men to pray to himself, but always to pray to the Father, in his name. But does it matter on which side we find God, so that we find him? The representations of his manifoldness given in the terms "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" are

mere accommodations to the limitations of human thought and language. Names are not of the essence of prayer. The essential thing in prayer is to get behind the name to the Infinite One as a living, loving, personal Reality, and to hold communion with him. He is often found under strange forms; he is often addressed by strange names; but whatever the form under which men worship him, whatever be the name by which they call upon him, if they are only sincere he "will answer them out of his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand."

6. *Prayer and Miracle.*

"Prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him" (Acts 12. 5). "Many were gathered together and were praying" (Acts 12. 12). With the early Christians prayer was the first and last resource in trouble. When hunted to cover by their cruel persecutors they prayed; when in their hands they prayed. Allying themselves with the Infinite they believed that anything might happen. And strange things did happen. One of the strangest was the escape of Peter from prison.

The arrest of Peter, their puissant leader, had thrown the Christian brotherhood into consternation. Fortunately, although Herod the king had no scruples about putting him to death, he had scruples about doing so at the time of the passover. The delay gave time for something to be done. What the disciples did was to pray on Peter's behalf.

They prayed earnestly and unitedly; and while they prayed the chains by which he was bound fell from his hands, the gates were opened, and he was led by an angel out of prison. As Peter himself stood knocking at the gate of the house where the disciples were assembled, with strange inconsistency they could hardly believe that their prayers had been answered. It seemed too good to be true. They had evidently been looking for an answer in a different way. Perhaps they thought that the Lord would soften the heart of Herod and lead him to relent. They did not consider that God could break chains and open prison doors more easily than he could move some hearts. It is often the lesser miracle that astonishes us most.

The question of miracle, which is here raised, is beset with difficulties many and great. But if we admit that there is a God, a miracle is at least antecedently possible. The Almighty cannot be helpless in the face of any difficulty. Nor is there anything to hinder him from working in a way contrary to his ordinary method. Speaking as a scientist and philosopher, Bergson, in his "Creative Evolution," refers to God as one who is doing things, and to this world as a place where new and strange things happen. Amid the flux and change of human life there is a vital force at work which any time may break forth in strange ways. That force which is in constant exercise for the good of man acts freely, adjusts itself to every changing situation, and is unvanquished by any difficulty. It is sufficient

to every need, efficient to every end. To believe in its operation is to believe in miracle, or at least in the possibility of miracle. It is to believe that unwonted things may be wrought by God on behalf of his children whenever their highest interests, or the highest interests of the Kingdom, demand them.

The recognition of a power behind all outward phenomena, to whom all things are possible, is called for in any explanation that can be given of Peter's deliverance. Something was done in answer to prayer that cannot be accounted for except by the working of such a power. At the touch of God's finger prison doors gave way. But here is the difficulty—occasions occur, and many of them, when prison doors refuse to give way, and the bones of God's saints rot within prison walls, in spite of agonizing prayers offered up on their behalf through weary years. O the impotence of the prayer that lies outside of God's design, and the almightiness of the prayer that falls within it!

But whether prison doors open or remain shut, prayer has its use in preparing for whatever God appoints. Did prison doors never open in answer to prayer, we would soon cease to pray in the hour of extremity; did they always open, there would be no test for faith. To trust in God, and sing his praise within unyielding walls, may be a greater triumph than to trust him and sing his praise when the prison doors swing open.

7. The Acceptable Prayer of a Non-Christian Worshiper.

"Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10. 4). This was said of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who had abandoned idolatry, and had become a worshiper of the one living and true God. An earnest truth-seeker, he had in all probability become "a proselyte of the gate." He is spoken of as one "who prayed to God always" (verse 2). He had broken loose from the past and had come so far on the right way, and now he prayed unceasingly that he might reach the goal. And he did reach it.

While still walking in the gray light of the early dawn it was told him by Peter that his prayers and his alms had gone up to heaven, for "a memorial before God." They were among the things that God wanted to remember. One evidence that they were remembered was that Peter was sent to him. There are prayers and alms that God delights to remember, and there are those which he wants to forget, and to which he sends no answer.

The combination of devotion and philanthropy must in itself have been pleasing to God. The alms of Cornelius showed the reality of his prayers. They showed that he was what he was reputed to be, "a good man," honest and genuine to the core. The prayers of such a man God has no reason to deny or discount.

That God should regard with favor the prayers

of a partially enlightened soul is to many a cause of great perplexity. They forget that with him there is "no respect of persons," that all souls sustain to him the same relation, and are to him alike dear. They forget too that it is the state of the heart that God looks at rather than the enlightenment of the head, and that he rejects the prayers of those who know his name but possess not his Spirit, while accepting the prayers of those who are ignorant of his name, but who possess his Spirit. It is not the measure of knowledge that makes prayer acceptable, but the measure of sincerity. Strong faith may exist where there is imperfect knowledge, as in the case of the Syrophœnician woman, who thought furtively to steal a blessing by touching the fringe of the Master's robe. Nowhere does a soul call upon the All-Father out of the deepest ignorance whose prayer is not heard and answered.

Why should we hesitate in saying that the prayers and alms of this emerging soul, who lived up to his light, were meritorious? Meritorious in the sense of purchasing heaven's favor, of course, they were not, but meritorious in the sense of being essentially good, and of yielding God pleasure, they undoubtedly were. The guidance sought was given not *for* his prayers but *through* his prayers. Peter, who had himself been praying on the house-top of Simon the tanner for light and leading, was sent to teach him; the truth fell into an open heart, and he became the first convert to Christ from

among the Gentiles. With the conversion of Cornelius, Christianity burst its Jewish shell and entered upon a new era of expansion. That solitary praying pagan, struggling toward the light, became "a partaker of the promise of Christ by the gospel," and is now represented by a mighty world-encircling host.

8. *Prayer for Spiritual Equipment.*

In the primitive church gifts of grace, which are to be distinguished from gifts of nature, were bestowed as they were needed. These gifts were of two classes—general and special, or ordinary and extraordinary. They were all conferred by prayer and were given for efficiency in the work.

(1) *Prayer for ordinary gifts.* "When they fasted and prayed and laid their hands upon them, they sent them away" (Acts 13. 3). Apart from showing the preparation sought for in the work of evangelism, these words have value in revealing how, at the first, the church ordained their missionaries. They fasted and prayed and laid their hands upon them. The church of to-day would have given Barnabas and Saul a banquet, and after copious speech-making and abbreviated praying, would have sent them away to the work. The custom of fasting in connection with the ordaining of missionaries obtained long after the apostolic age, but in the present day it is practically unknown. With the passing away of fasting has come the shortening of prayer. The modern missionary has

the church behind him in the matter of financial support; would that he were as well assured of its spiritual support. That he is prayed for by a few devout souls it is his solace to believe, but how blessed his lot would be if he had the consciousness that beneath him was the upholding power of the prayers of the entire church! It is not without cause that the concert of prayer for missions has been superseded by the missionary address bristling with the most interesting facts gleaned from the mission field. The church has grown too practical to spend much time in prayer! Did she only know it, prayer is the most practical thing in which she can engage.

There is a meaningful touch given to this brief recital of the first ordination of the missionaries. The church at Antioch having set them apart by prayer and the laying on of consecrating hands, "sent them away"—to which is added, "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia," opening there by their preaching "a door of faith to the Gentiles." The act of the church in sending them forth coincided with the act of the Holy Spirit. They went forth as representing the church, and the Holy Spirit; they went forth with the church's blessing, under the Spirit's guidance, and clothed with the Spirit's power. The work before them was untried and difficult, and they felt themselves utterly unable to cope with it; but upborne on the tide of divine energy, they were carried along to almost unbroken success. The

dynamic force which accompanied their message enabled them afterward to say, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance."

The thing which gives to the ordination of these two missionaries special significance is the fact that it was the inauguration of a world-wide missionary movement which is still unspent. That movement was born in prayer; it derived its conquering power from prayer. And ever since it has maintained its pristine power just in proportion as it has put its trust in the efficacy of prayer. When its representatives have had behind them a prayerless church they have fallen back discomfited; when they have had behind them a praying church they have marched forward to victory.

(2) *Prayer for extraordinary gifts.* "They sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8. 14, 15). Calvin, commenting on this verse, remarks: "Surely, Luke speaketh not in this place of the common grace of the Spirit, whereby God doth regenerate us, that we may be his children, but of the singular gifts, wherewith God would have certain endued at the beginning of the gospel to beautify Christ's kingdom." This is clear from the contextual setting of his words. He does not mean that the gift of the Spirit, which is imparted in some measure to all believers, had not been bestowed, but that special and miraculous gifts, which were

needed in that day for attestation, had not yet been bestowed.

The special gifts which were given in the form and measure in which they were needed for present use were given in connection with prayer and the laying on of apostolic hands. They might have been given otherwise, but they were not. They were prayed for, that their source might be acknowledged, and that they might be regarded as means rather than ends. If made ends in themselves, and ambitiously sought after, as in the case of Simon Magus, grave evils ensued.

> Heaven does with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves.

When God gives to anyone, in answer to prayer, special endowments, it is that they may be used in specialized forms of service.

PART FOURTH

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE LIVES AND WRITINGS OF THE APOSTLES

CHAPTER I

PRAYER IN THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF PAUL

In His Life

Paul, who was Christ's chief interpreter, and who reflected in his life the spirit of primitive Christianity, puts a high value upon prayer. His soul was steeped in prayer. All his labors were begun, continued, and ended in prayer. He prayed "day and night exceedingly." Behind his life of abounding service and sacrifice, and accounting for it was his hidden life of prayer.

When he met the Lord in the way to Damascus, and bowed before him in complete surrender, it was said in evidence of his conversion, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9. 11). His Christian life was begun with prayer. The first pulse-beat of his new-born soul was a response to God; its first cry was a cry to God. Young Saul had often prayed before this; now he *prayed* in a new and deeper sense. He prayed as only a Christian can pray. Until Christ's love touched him, and opened up the fountain of the great deep within him, he did not know what true prayer was. From that time a new life of prayer began to develop, which went on deepening and widening until the end, fructifying his own experience, and making glad the waste places of human life.

When Paul was thrust into the inner prison at

Philippi for preaching "concerning the Way" he did not spend his time bewailing his hard lot, or fulminating against the Roman authorities, but in prayer and "singing hymns unto God" (Acts 16. 25). With his back lacerated by cruel scourgings, his feet fast in the stocks, and his ears assaulted by the ribald jests and taunts of the outcasts by whom he was surrounded, he rendered unabashed testimony to the comforting and upholding grace of Christ by lifting up his voice in prayer and praise. An earthquake interrupted these exercises, shaking the prison house to its foundations. Following the earthquake was a revival meeting, at which the jailer and his household were converted. Thus the prison by being made a place of prayer became a place of salvation.

In his defense before the Roman officer on the occasion of his arrest at Jerusalem, he tells that as he "prayed in the temple" (Acts 22. 17); literally, as he "was holding a colloquy with God," he fell into a trance, or state of spiritual ecstasy, in which he saw a vision of his risen Lord, and heard him say: "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; because they will not receive of thee testimony concerning me. Depart, for I will send thee hence unto the Gentiles." This was his apostolic commission, and it was received as he was praying. Prayer released him from his bondage to the senses, brought him into direct contact with his unseen Lord, making him sensitive to his touch and responsive to his call.

When Christianity burst its Judaistic bonds and entered upon the work of a world-wide conquest, the church at Antioch became the center of the new missionary propaganda. Deliberating as to what agencies should be adopted, "as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13. 2, 3). To the divine commission which Paul had already inwardly received was now added the ordination of the church, in which act fraternal confidence was expressed, and in connection with which prayer for equipment in service was offered. In the spirit and power of prayer these first missionary projects were conceived and carried out.

In his Epistle to the Romans Paul had expressed a strong desire to visit the imperial city. He had said, "God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you, always in my prayers; making request, if by any means now at length I may have a prosperous journey, by the will of God to come unto you" (Rom. 1. 9, 10). In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke records the answer to that prayer. But how different was the way in which it was fulfilled from that which Paul had expected! Having appealed to Cæsar, he went to Rome as a prisoner to plead his case; and there he abode two whole years before receiving audience of the em-

peror, welcoming "all that went in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28. 30, 31).

His Romeward journey was marked with prayer. Coming to Miletus, he sent for the elders of the church of Ephesus, and after giving them tender counsel regarding the watch-care which they ought to exercise over "the church of the Lord, which he purchased with his own blood," "he kneeled down and prayed with them all" (Acts 20. 36). Later on, when he landed at Tyre, he gathered the disciples together, and as he departed, says the chronicler, "Kneeling down on the beach, we prayed, and bade each other farewell" (Acts 21. 4, 5). In this incidental way we see what a large place the ministry of prayer had in Paul's missionary labors. Still later, when "drifting through the sea of Adria" in a leaky ship, while the heathen sailors were vainly struggling to repair the damage which the storm had wrought, Paul was upon his knees praying for the safety of those who sailed with him; and having received assurance that his prayer had been answered, he gathered the crew and the passengers together and exhorted them to be of good cheer, because their lives would be spared, even as the Lord had spoken unto him (see Acts 27. 25). What a blessing unspeakable to have on board a sinking ship a man of God who coming from the secret place of divine communion can speak with unfaltering assurance of the purpose of God's merciful will. No sooner had the ship gone to pieces on the island

of Mileta than another opportunity came for the ministry of prayer. Publius, the father of the governor, lay seriously sick, and Paul entering in after the manner of the Master, "prayed, and laying his hands on him healed him" (Acts 28. 8), thereby testifying to the grace and power of the Lord whom he served, and incidently securing for his companions in distress many substantial favors.

And so through all the details of his life, from his conversion to his martyrdom, the golden thread of prayer was interwoven.

Prayer in Paul's Writings

1. *Individualizing in Prayer.*

"God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Rom. 1. 9). We "do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1. 9). "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment (Phil. 1. 9). "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers" (1 Thess. 1. 2).

Paul had a long prayer list. To be a friend of his was to be made a subject of his prayers. He left no one out. He prayed for them one by one; and he doubtless prayed for them frequently by name.

Many prayers are too vague and indefinite. They

deal in vapory generalities. The more earnest prayer becomes, the more definite it becomes. A parent praying for the recovery of a sick child does not allow his thoughts to wander over creation, but focalizes them into one definite and reiterated request. A parent praying for the conversion of a wayward child narrows his prayers in the same way. A Sunday school teacher who is watching for the flowering time in the spiritual life of the members of her class will pray definitely for them, taking them to the throne of grace one by one. A pastor who, like the Good Shepherd, knows his own sheep by name will pray for them individually, as their special needs come up before him. And any Christian who gives himself to prayer for others will be drawn out to consider their special circumstances; he will not scatter his fire but will pray for special things. This will give his prayer point and power. Definite asking will bring definite answers.

It is worthy of note that the things which Paul asked for his friends were spiritual things. He prayed that they might increase in the knowledge of the divine will, that they might abound in love and in spiritual discernment. He sought for them the best gifts. A great deal of intercessory prayer is keyed too low, and it is concerned chiefly with outward interests. Many hasten to pray for the deliverance of a friend from the grip of some fell bodily disease, and show no solicitude for his spiritual safety. They pray for his relief from com-

mercial disaster, and forget to pray for him when his soul is imperiled by the corrupting and enervating influences of commercial prosperity. In his praying for others Paul puts the emphasis upon the inner and supreme things.

2. *The Deeper Answer.*

"And by reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations, that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch. Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12. 7-9). Paul's thorn in the flesh was evidently some humbling physical infirmity, which was seen of others. His thrice repeated prayer for its removal was refused. Every time he besought the Lord that it might depart he was promised something else. When he prayed, "Take away this rankling thorn," the Lord answered, "I will give you grace to bear it, and to profit by it." He asked one thing and got another.

Was Paul's prayer unanswered because the specific boon which he requested was denied? To think so is a mistake. Looking at the matter superficially, he got a blank refusal; looking at it more deeply, he got what in his heart of hearts he desired. The formal request was denied, but something better was given.

Paul as a Christian man desired above all else that God's will might be done in everything in his life. In that will he was ever ready to acquiesce. In things beyond his knowledge he was ready to leave the choice with God; for he believed that he alone knew what to give or what to withhold, so as to secure for him the highest spiritual ends. While asking, therefore, for the removal of this bodily weakness, he was offering the deeper prayer that God's will might be done; and in giving him a spiritual blessing rather than a temporal one God gave him a deeper answer.

"When we beg deliverance," says Leighton, "we are not unanswered if he give patience and support." Thus was Paul's prayer answered when, instead of the removal of his stake in the flesh, he received sufficiency of grace to enable him to say, "Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." His prayer "was no doubt dictated rather by his anxiety for the welfare of the gospel than by any longing for personal ease or comfort" (J. E. McFadyen). And when he came to see that his infirmity was no impediment to his work, if by it he was brought to a deeper experience of Christ's strengthening grace, he did not merely submit to it, he gloried in it.

Many who pray for the removal of bodily disease are not cured. They have to bear the burden of their infirmity to the end of life. In spite of their sincere belief in God's power to heal, and in spite of their prayers and the prayers of others, the

disease refuses to depart and runs its course to a fatal end. What does this mean? Does it show that God has failed to respond to the cry of his child in the hour of his direst need? May it not, rather, imply that God may have been better to him than his prayers, denying his surface petition that he might grant his heart's deep desire?

To secure the highest good to his children the heavenly Father does not hesitate to deny the lower for the higher. He denies the stone that is asked so that he may give the loaf that is needed; he denies the removal of the thorn that he may bestow his triumphing grace.

Pray on, sad heart,
That which thou pleadest for may not be given,
But in the lofty altitude where souls are lifted, there
Thou shalt find help to bear thy daily lot
Which is not elsewhere found.
(*Ella Wheeler Wilcox.*)

3. *Desire and Prayer.*

"My heart's desire and my supplication to God is for them, that they may be saved" (Rom. 10. 1).

Desire is dynamic. If unchecked, it will express itself in prayer. Paul's desire for the salvation of his kinsmen according to the flesh, drove him to his knees, and could find relief only in earnest and continued supplication to God on their behalf. Desire and prayer are twins, born at the same moment.

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire
Uttered or unexpressed.

Desires are heard in heaven. "God hears us sigh, though mute." He "hears the desire of the humble," but Fénelon reminds us that while "to pray is to desire, it is to desire what God would have us desire." To which sentiment H. Clay Trumbull adds, "No child of God has a right to pray for that which he has no right to desire." How needful, then, to see that our desires themselves are right!

> Whatever is good to wish, ask that of heaven;
> And if for any wish thou canst not pray,
> Then pray to God to cast that wish away.

The word which Paul uses, and which is rendered "desire," expresses more than mere well-wishing, or a good disposition of the heart. It carries with it the idea of intention of will. It is something that seeks realization—an underground stream that seeks to come to the surface, a heart-wish that must needs find voice. The prayer into which it passes is prayer in its most distinct and urgent form; it is free, familiar, bold approach to God; it is earnest pleading with God after the manner in which Abraham pleaded for Sodom.

The thing for which Paul agonizingly longed and prayed, with the intensity of a God-begotten love, was Israel's salvation. That was the deepest desire of his heart. He believed in the possibility of its final fulfillment because God had given him the heart to pray for it. Hence we do not wonder at him expressing his conviction that "all Israel shall be saved." It was the inspiration of this mighty

hope that kept him upon his knees, by giving him the assurance that his outbreathed desire was in harmony with the mind and purpose of God.

4. *Working in Prayer.*

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers" (Col. 4. 12). The Revised Version reads, "always striving for you"; that is, striving earnestly like a combatant in the public games. The most strenuous forthputting of effort is indicated.

Epaphras was one of the minor characters among the disciples. We think of him as modest and shy, destitute of the gift of oratory, and occupying an inconspicuous place in the councils of the church. In all probability it was said of him that he was not much of a worker. If Paul ever heard a whisper of such a complaint he here corrects it by saying, "Epaphras *is* a worker, a great worker; he works mightily in prayer; while others pray in working he works in praying." The Latin proverb, *Labore est orare,* is often used to cover or excuse shortcomings in the prayer-life. It contains a great truth; but its converse "to pray is to work," is equally true. They also work who only kneel and pray.

> Work shall be prayer if all is wrought
> As thou wouldst have it done,
> And prayer by Thee inspired and taught
> Itself with work is one.

"Prayer," says Liddon, "is religion in action." It is "a distinct, unique, elemental power in the

spiritual universe, as pervasive and constant as the great occult powers of nature" (Austen Phelps). "When I pray for a man," says J. H. Jowett, "I am liberating a power in his behalf as real as the electric energy that glows in the carbon filament above us. You never do a finer work than when you finely pray." Prayer is "the combustion of a soul," by which is produced kenetic force, which, entering into the spiritual order, works out certain definite results. As a means to any and all of the important ends which we seek to reach, it has a place all its own.

But prayer is something more than the soul in action, the outthrusting of the spiritual self, the setting free and making operative of a hidden fountain of dynamical energy; it is the practical operation of a power which God himself has set in motion, the carrying out of a work which he is behind. When a Christian energizes in prayer for others it is God who energizes through him. His prayer is a connecting wire along which God transmits his power and flashes his message. It is a channel for the water of life to flow through into other souls; it is a cooperating force which God can use in bringing certain things to pass in the lives of others and in the life of the world which otherwise would not happen. "Through prayer God fulfills himself, having made the prayer of faith a potent energy in the universe; so that, if we would have the influence of the universe work together for good to one to whom we are

linked in visible and invisible ties, we owe it to that loved one and to ourselves and to God to pray in faith for his protection and guidance" (Dr. H. C. Trumbull).

Prayer thus enables a man to get above and beyond himself. It enlarges his personality. It redeems his life from spiritual impotence, by connecting it with the power and riches of the Infinite; it gives him the consciousness that he is not an unsupported unit, but that he has a whole infinity added to his value. However weak he may be himself, when he prays divine power is conveyed to him, and for the time being he becomes the agent through which it acts. It is therefore no overstatement of the case to say that "a man's power in the spiritual world is to be measured by his prayers" (Forbes Robinson).

Some idea of this kind must have been in Paul's mind when he spoke of Epaphras as energizing in prayer that his brethren at Colossæ "might stand perfect, and fully assured in all the will of God." He must have believed that the outflowing energy of this humble, praying saint flowed into the stream of the divine purpose; that the forthputting of his will gave direction to the will of God; that his prayer "moved the hand that moves the universe."

Such is the dignity and glory which the possession of this power puts upon a puny mortal. It makes him a medium of connection between the power-center of the universe and the souls of men.

5. *Prayer a Form of Service.*

"Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thess. 5. 25). "Strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Rom. 15. 30). "Helping together on our behalf by your supplication" (2 Cor. 1. 11). The request for prayer is founded upon the conviction that in the network of influences by which souls are connected, and by which they are enabled to act upon one another, prayer has a place. Paul had no doubt whatever that prayer sets in motion influences by which other lives are affected. He believed that he could be helped by having others pray for him; he believed that in some way he did not understand others could labor together with him in prayer for success in the work, and that the two streams of prayer could meet and mingle. In this very way they could all join forces in helping on the work of human redemption.

In the list of "the distributions of the Spirit" given in 1 Cor. 12. 28 there is one gift which has been greatly overlooked, namely, the gift of "helps" or "services of help." This is a common gift, and is attained by those who do not possess such spectacular gifts as those of tongues or of healing. One form of that gift consists in *helping by prayer*. No form of help is more valuable than this, and it has the advantage of being open to all. In it the humblest may excel. To the shut-in ones it affords an illimitable field of action. It makes it possible for the most repressed and secluded life to exert the

most powerful influence. When shut out of what has been called active service we can pray. When age creeps on, and some forms of outward activity come to an end, we can pray,

> "O power to do! O baffled will!
> O prayer and action, ye are one!
> Who may not strive may yet fulfill
> The harder task of standing still,
> And good but wished with God is done."

Never can it be ever guessed how much the tempted, the sorrowful, and the sinful are helped by the prayers of God's saints. When Robert Murray McCheyne died some one remarked, "Perhaps the heaviest blow to his brethren, his people, and the land, is the loss of his intercessions." "I wonder," inquires Dr. J. H. Jowett, "which of the two was in the thick of the fight—Dr. Paton living out among the savage tribes of the New Hebrides, or his old mother praying for him in the town of Dumfries." Just as likely the latter. Perhaps the proper way to look at it is that taken by Hartman Von Aue in the lines,

> He with the sword of battle, she at home in prayer,
> Both win a victory, and both the glory share.

It is not possible for anyone to measure the help that has come to him from the sincere prayers of Christian friends. Often when faint and weary he has received a strange accession of strength, and, like Luther, under similar circumstances, he has been led to exclaim, "I feel as if I were being prayed for." Some unseen Aaron and Hur may at the

moment be holding up his hands. Results often come to our labors in the Master's vineyard, filling us with a glad surprise, which, if we could only trace to their source, would lead us to the sick chamber of some obscure praying saint.

> The weary one had rest, the sad had joy that day,
> And wondered how;
> A plowman singing at his work had prayed,
> "Lord, keep them now."
>
> Away in foreign lands they wonder how
> The feeble word had power;
> At home the Christians, two or three, had met
> To pray an hour.
>
> Yes, we are always wondering, wondering how;
> Because we do not see
> Some one unknown perhaps, and far away
> On bended knee.

What a wonderful provision this is for the widening of the scope of our influence! What a wonderful escape it provides from our limitations! We can help those who are at a distance; those who otherwise are inaccessible to us. Our prayers can enter through closed doors; they can go wherever God himself can go.

Prayer does not differ from any other form of social influence. It is in harmony with the principle of mutuality of dependence upon which society is structured. In order to the accomplishment of certain results in the establishment of his kingdom God needs the cooperation of our prayers just as much as he needs our cooperation in other ways. Having conditioned his action upon ours he cannot move

until we move. There are mighty works which he cannot do if the agents upon whom he depends are unready.

> God gives us skill,
> But not without men's hands. He can not make
> Antonio Stradivarius' violins without Antonio.

And he cannot do certain things in the spiritual realm without the assistance of those who labor with him and for him through prayer, as well as through more outward and obvious forms of service.

In the redemption of the world the man who prays becomes the minister of God's grace to men. He virtually puts his life at God's disposal, that he may use it on behalf of others. Therefore he is careful to make his conduct tally with his prayers, and to put out of his life everything that would hinder the blessing he asks for others coming to them. Unless prayer be real it is impotent; unless consistent with what is professed it is useless.

Prayer for others eliminates selfishness and brings us into sympathy with God in his world-embracing purpose of redemption. It draws out our love to those for whom we pray, until our praying becomes as altruistic as other forms of social ministry. Tennyson, seeing in the spirit of altruism in prayer the glory of our higher nature, asks,

> "What are men better than sheep or goats
> That nourish a blind life within the brain,
> If knowing God, they lift not hands in prayer,
> Both for themselves, and those who call them friends?"

To answer the inarticulate desire, or spoken entreaty of other hearts for help, by praying for them, is to fulfill one of life's most blessed ministries.

6. *The Sacrifice of the Lower for the Higher.*

"Defraud ye not one the other, except it be by consent for a season, that ye may give yourselves unto prayer" (1 Cor. 7. 5). The substance of these words is that "prayer should make room for itself"; that it should not be hindered by the enjoyment of the things that are lawful and right; and that, on the other hand, it should not override the interests and claims of others. The apostle's argument runneth thus, "Within the charmed circle of the home do not deprive anyone of the interest and attention which is due. Remember that natural obligations come before religious privileges. Only with the consent of those concerned, or with the certainty that you are not defrauding them, may you forego pleasures which are allowable, that you may give yourselves wholly up unto prayer for a season."

The verb *scholazo,* which is here rendered "give yourselves up," literally means "empty yourselves." It is applied to the vacating of a house. The obvious meaning is, "Empty the heart of all domestic cares; cut loose from all conjugal delights, that you may devote yourselves to special prayer." This is not to be done habitually, but only for a season.

Just as we need an occasional holiday to rest the body, so we need an occasional holy-day to refresh the spirit—a time deliberately set apart for prayer; a time of unhurried communion, when the soul is at leisure with itself, when a veil is drawn between ourselves and created things, and when we have ample time to pray ourselves out. From such a retreat we come forth clothed with new power.

To get time for such a protracted season of prayer we must be willing to pay the price; and the price demanded is a high one, being the sacrifice of the lower for the higher, the earthly for the heavenly. But it is worth it; no price being too high for a boon so great, and a blessing so precious.

7. Applied Prayer.

"Praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance" (Eph. 6. 18). Prayer has all seasons for its own. It is never out of date if it be "in the Spirit." Its fruits are always to be expected. For its answers we are to watch "in all perseverance"; or, as Meyer puts it, "in every kind of perseverance." Meyer's rendering is a happy one, because, while keeping in the forefront perseverance in prayer, it leaves room for the perseverance in the works which should accompany prayer. And certainly prayer and works ought to go together, for they hold the same relation to one another as faith and works. Prayer without works is dead, being alone. When alive it is never alone.

A great deal has been said and written about applied Christianity. An important part of applied Christianity is applied prayer, that is, prayer carried into practical effect. Praying should be followed by doing. "Pray to God," says Spurgeon, "but keep the hammer going."

Prayer and pains
Bring best of gains.

To do nothing but pray is to come short of duty. Prayer may be a subtle way of evading responsibility, after the manner of the Christian Scientists, who give absent treatment instead of service, and who excuse themselves from going into the slums by saying that they can help from a distance. Prayer is no substitute for work. The Master does not say, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye pray about them," but "happy are ye if ye *do* them." Prayer is a hollow thing if it ends with itself; it is genuine only when it leads to practical service. "Praying without doing, is a bow without a string." "Let no one pray for victory," says Lyman Abbott, "unless he is willing that God should answer by giving him a battle to fight"; and let no one pray for others unless he is willing to become a laborer together with God for the fulfillment of his purpose of grace concerning them.

All prayer is preliminary to duty. It is also a stimulus to effort. It produces an impulse to work. God gives the things asked for in answer to prayer because he knows there will be more than prayer;

he knows that the true suppliant will practice his prayers, that he will work them out in deeds. Does he pray for the power of the Spirit? he will use that power for the benefit of others. Does he pray for the poor? he will make haste to minister to their necessities. Does he pray for the coming of the Kingdom? He will do all that he can to make it come. Does he pray for missions? He will give liberally for their support. Does he pray for the union of God's people? He will labor to take down all dividing fences. Does he pray for the conversion of sinners? He will be willing to wet his feet to save them from perishing. No one who truly prays expects the ripe fruit to drop into his open mouth; he expects to grow it. If he prays for daily bread, he expects it to come from daily toil; and if he prays for any spiritual blessing, he expects it to come from the practical use of that augmented power which has come to him through prayer. It is vain to pray if we stop with prayer. A man who lived in a swamp prayed daily to Jupiter for health. "Pray from the hilltop and your prayer will be answered," said Jupiter. Prayer for health should always be accompanied by the use of remedial measures, and prayer for anything whatsoever should always be accompanied by the use of means. When the use of means is apparently discarded, it is often unconsciously employed. Those institutions which are said to be supported purely by prayer often adopt the most skillful methods of advertising their work, and the most fetching methods of se-

curing supplies. Their leaders pray so as to be overheard. They let the Lord's people know what they expect of the Lord. In that there is nothing wrong—only let it be acknowledged as a wise and legitimate way of doing things.

When, therefore, it is said that prayer is "a sense of something transacting" it must not be forgotten that the thing transacting is to be not God's only but man's. The certain part of it is God's, the uncertain part is man's. For the lack of man's part the work lags. The work is poorly done because the prayer is faulty. Better prayer would give better work. True prayer is a costly thing. To live up to our prayers will call for toil and sacrifice. Prayer for the removal of the plague will call for the enforcement of heroic sanitary measures; prayer for personal holiness will call for self-crucifixion; prayer for the spread of the kingdom will call for sacrificial self-giving. The declaration of Walter Rauschenbusch that "when the politicians and the social exploiters have to deal with the stubborn courage of men who pray about politics they will have a new factor to reckon with," undoubtedly holds good, provided those who pray are prepared to turn their prayers into ballots, and into deeds of sacrificial social service. Otherwise their prayers are "sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal."

8. *Praying in the Spirit.*

"Praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20). "In like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity;

for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8. 26, 27). It was a distinct and definite promise that in the Christian dispensation, in which we are now living, the Holy Spirit was to be a power in prayer. Christians were to pray *in him,* that is, in the sphere of his influence and operation, as standing within the circle of his wisdom and grace. He was to be behind their prayers, inspiring them and shaping them; to those who put themselves under his tuition he was to give skill and power in prayer. Their outspoken word was to be first of all his inspoken word, so that it might be said of them, "It is not ye that pray, but the Spirit of your Father that prayeth in you" (adapted from Matt. 10. 20).

As our prayer-prompter and guide he puts us into a right condition to receive by putting us into the right condition to pray. He suggests such requests as God can answer. Yea, the very fact that he leads us to ask for certain things is presumptive proof that God means to give them. By bringing our desires into the agreement with the divine will he makes them certain of fulfillment. Juliana of Norwich, the English mystic, expresses this thought in her words of testimony: "Our Lord said unto me I am the ground of thy beseechings; first it is

my will that thou have it; and then I make thee to beseech it; and thou beseechest. How, then, should it be that thou shouldst not have thy beseechings?" Madam Guyon, telling how she grew into the prayer of silence until vocal prayer almost ceased, says, "There was made in me, without the sound of words, a continual prayer, which seemed to me to be the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ himself; a prayer of the Word which is made by the Spirit, who, according to Saint Paul, asketh for us that which is good, perfect, and conformable to the will of God."

This deep experience, in which prayer goes beyond the use of words, is what Saint Paul refers to when he speaks of the Spirit living within us—praying with inaudible groanings, drawing us out to God in desires which are unutterable. He speaks of him as helping us in our infirmity, putting himself into us; sharing our burden, coming under it, taking the heavy end of it; and when the power to pray has been crushed out of us by the weight of the mystery of a suffering creation, bringing ease of heart by expressing in voiceless groanings the desires which lie concealed in the depths of the subconscious mind. When we have no desire to pray he moves us to pray, he helps us to pray; and when we are too weak to pray because of infirmity of will, or heart, or mind, or body, he prays for us in sighs and groans surcharged with feeling which our poor human words are powerless to express. He helps us not only in our weakness but also in our

ignorance, for "we know not how to pray as we ought" unless we are taught of him. He enlightens us as to the proper matter of prayer, imparting to us the knowledge of our needs, so that in his light we see light, and in our inexpressible longings desire the things that he desires for us. And He who searcheth the heart, knowing his intercession for the saints to be in harmony with his will, answers his unspoken prayers.

We thus see that in this personal relation of the Spirit of God with the spirit of man's joint action is clearly implied. When we pray he prays through us. When he prays we pray through him. He takes up our prayers as his own; he becomes our mouthpiece; our prayers go up to the eternal throne with his indorsement, and hence they find acceptance.

9. *The Cry of the Child to the Father.*

"Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4. 6). Prayer here is set forth as the soul's response to the higher call, the answer of the child to the Father's voice. The thought of Paul is this: "Because ye have come into filial relation to God, he has given to you the evidence of that relationship by sending the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, leading you to call upon God as your Father." "The Spirit," says Meyer, "is the seal of sonship unto which they had entered through faith." First there is the act of adoption, then "the

spirit of adoption"; first the standing of the sons, then the free and simple fellowship of sons; first the consciousness of sonship, then the spontaneous and fervent outcry of the heart in joyful recognition of the Father's answering love.

The Spirit who reveals our sonship and awakens the consciousness of it, imparts the impulse to pray. The outgoing of the soul to the Father is the result of his inworking; but whereas in Rom. 8. 26 the Spirit is represented as making intercession for us with unutterable groanings, here he is represented as praying through us in audible crying. And as the sense of sonship is clear or dim, the cry of the heart to the Father is strong or feeble.

When the sense of sonship is at its weakest, and the half-awakened soul is like

> An infant crying in the night,
> An infant crying for the light,
> And with no language but a cry,

to the Father's ear that cry is full of meaning. Love is the interpreter of need. The Father understands what lies behind the feeblest cry of his most far-away child, and he answers, not according to his child's knowledge of himself, but according to his knowledge of his child. This discloses the heart of prayer. Founded upon filial relations, the blessings which it brings is not an alms dropped into the palm of a pauper but a gift bestowed by a wise and gracious Father upon a suppliant child.

The Spirit in the heart by which we pray is the

Spirit of God's Son—the Spirit which he promised, and which he bestows. By his Spirit he dwells within us, prompting us to pray as he did, in the happy consciousness of divine sonship. The endearing terms, "Abba, Father," which he teaches us to use, were no doubt employed by himself and his disciples. When we pray in that fashion we stand where he stood; we share with him the privileges of his exalted position; and identify ourselves with what was vital and essential in his life of prayer.

The cry of the heart to God as Father is the deepest thing in Christian experience and in Christian prayer. To know God as Christ revealed him; to pray to him as Father is to pray to him as Christ taught us to pray, and as Christ himself prayed. To have fellowship with God as Father is to attain the utmost goal of the life of the Spirit. Hence it is no wonder that from sonship Paul predicts heirship; reasoning thus: "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. *So that* thou art no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God," that is, an heir by divine right. And so to the blessed Paraclete, who ever stands beside us and dwells within us, to help us realize our heavenly lineage, and brings us into possession of our heavenly birthright, we should ever pray,

> "In us, 'Abba, Father,' cry,—
> Earnest of our bliss on high,
> Seal of immortality,—
> Comforter divine!"

This certainty of sonship, with its free and joyous communion, was singularly absent from the prayer-life of the older generations of Christians, whose conception of God was that of a King rather than a Father. He was hard to reach, and equally hard to persuade. These old saints would not rise from their knees till they were "sure of his audience." Had they known him as Father, they would have been sure of his audience before going upon their knees; and instead of going afar to find him they would have found him in their hearts and have received his instant audience and his utmost blessing.

10. *Intercession the Crown and Glory of Prayer.*

"I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men" (1 Tim. 2. 1). Intercession is the crown and glory of prayer because it is the highest form of the altruistic spirit. The intercessor is utterly unselfish. He thinks of others, gives himself to others, loses all thought of his own interests, and ends in seeking the interests and ends of others. He does not think how he can make use of God; he does not stand with outstretched hands to receive something for himself; he stands by God's side, the almoner of his bounty, the dispenser of his grace.

In the play of forces by which we are helped intercession has a place. By it God is influenced; by it something is brought to bear upon others which God can use; by it connecting wires of per-

sonal interest are established, along which the grace and power of God can be transmitted; by it our wills are made to enter into his, so that through us he can find a new way of working out his purpose of redemption in other lives.

Intercession benefits the intercessor. It identifies him with the Great Intercessor and establishes a bond of sympathy between them. It brings him into fellowship and cooperation with him touching whatever he is seeking to accomplish in the lives of men around him. It lifts him up into the high realm where spiritual forces widely work, and makes his life part of the divine order which is being administered in the interests of redemption.

From the Christian idea of intercession the earlier and cruder forms of priestly intercession must, however, be rigorously excluded. They have been completely outgrown. The object of intercessory prayer, according to the Christian conception of it, is not to stay God's hand of vengeance, to induce him to be kind, or constrain him to do for the one prayed for what he was not originally disposed to do. Instead of praying that he may be merciful and kind, we are to pray to him because he *is* merciful and kind. We are not to fancy, as Abraham apparently did, when he pleaded for Sodom, that we are more merciful than God. We are in no danger whatever in outrunning God in our prayers, but are more likely to imitate Abraham in stopping praying before God stops giving. God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts and his ways

than our ways. His infinite love for others is always in advance of anything we can ask or think.

Intercessory prayer costs. Even a heathen sage like Seneca saw this, and said, "Nothing costs so much as what is bought by prayer." Driving home this truth, Dr. J. H. Jowett asks, "Do our prayers bleed?" He cites the case of Saint Catherine "whose prayers were red with sacrifice, and who felt the grasp of the pierced hand," and maintains that intercessory prayer that does not cost soul-travail is valueless. This is generally true, and in one respect at least it is universally true. The intercessor has often to tread the wine press alone. He goes into the holy place, or he ascends the mountain top alone. When fighting for a soul to save it from the powers of hell he is with the wild beasts in the wilderness, and there is none with him to aid him in the struggle. But all intercessory prayer is not of that character. Not infrequently it begins in soul agony and passes over into rest; it begins in solitariness of soul and ends in comforting and sustaining fellowship. Instead of travail there is quiet, confident, patient, waiting upon God, in the firm conviction that the prayer which has been seemingly unavailing shall yet be rewarded with a glad surprise.

Intercession is generally keyed too low. We do not always ask the best for our friends. We ask that they may find relief from pain, that their lives may be spared, that some great good of a temporal sort may come to them, thus conveying the im-

pression that spiritual things are secondary in our thoughts. In intercessory prayer, as in prayer for ourselves, the primacy must always be given to the spiritual.

But does some one ask, "If God is doing all that he wisely and righteously can for the highest good of all his children, what is the use of asking him to do more?" As well ask, "If God is doing all that he wisely and righteously can for the highest good of all his children, why trouble ourselves about their betterment?" The answer is that in both instances we are helping God; and we are helping him because he needs and asks our help. Intercessory prayer finds its explanation and justification in the fact that it is an appointed way of helping God to distribute his richest blessings to the largest number of his children.

11. *The Universality of Prayer.*

"For all the saints" (Eph. 6. 18). "For all men" (1 Tim. 2. 1). Prayer takes us out of ourselves; it delivers us from our limitations; it lifts us up into the universal; it connects us with the Infinite. True prayer is never provincial; but is as wide in its sweep as the grace of God and the need of man.

Here are the two great universalities of prayer. They include all who can possibly be made the subjects of prayer.

(1) *All saints.* Prayer is to be made for all saints, without distinction and without exception;

for unsaintly saints, for unorthodox saints, for all who have in them any trace of sainthood. Paul himself prayed that God's grace might be sent upon "all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place" (1 Cor. 1. 2), and upon all "that love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible" (Eph. 6. 24). He recognized his oneness with the whole body of believers; he looked upon them as constituting a great household of which he was a member, hence he identified their interests with his own. His love for the brethren overleaped all personal preferences and differences of opinion and bound them to him with a tie which nothing could break. It is true that sectarian barriers had not then been erected, and he had not these to surmount; but the human heart is ever the same, and catholicity of spirit is a thing of grace.

With the splitting of the church into so many divisions it has become more difficult for any one saint to pray for all other saints. It is hard for Protestant saints to pray for Roman Catholic saints, or for Roman Catholic saints to pray for Protestant saints. It is hard for the warring sects to include each other in God's covenanted mercies and to pray for each other's successes. It is so easy to substitute prayer for *our* church, or prayer for *the* church; so easy to pray that our ecclesiastical fleece may be wet with the dew of heaven, even if all others should be dry. Perhaps there is no more searching test of the spirit of prayer than this—Does it shut out any whom God receives? All

heaven-born prayer will embrace the whole of God's spiritual children, whatever name or sign they may bear; it will implore the benison of heaven to rest upon them, and will ask that they may speedily be brought together, and "become one flock, one shepherd."

(2) *All men.* Prayer is to be made for all sorts and conditions of men. "For kings and all that are in high places." In the case to whom these words were originally addressed it was to include that monster Nero, who was at that time reigning in Rome. But not for kings and rulers only is prayer to be made; it is to be made "for all men," from the king on the throne to the beggar on the dunghill. If this world-embracing view of prayer has become a religious commonplace, it is well to remember that the change has come about because of the new social atmosphere which Christianity has produced, and the new sense of humanity which it has awakened. When these words were written it was something entirely new.

Two of the leading festivals of the Roman Catholic Church are "All Saints' Day" and "All Souls' Day." What these days stand for and emphasize should permeate the prayer life of Christendom. Not at set times only, but at all times, is prayer to be made for all saints and for all souls. The praying Christian should rise superior to all religious and racial prejudices; instead of being provincial in his outlook, clannish in his spirit, restricted in his sympathy, he should have regard to Christians

as Christians, and to men as men; he should look upon the whole world of men through God's eyes; feel toward them as God feels. Instead of setting up his little stakes, and saying to the outflowing tide of divine love, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further," he should make his prayer express God's universal good will to the children of men.

(*a*) *He is to pray for all men; "for there is one God"* . . . "who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth"; one God who sustains the same relation to all, and who has the same purpose of redemption regarding all; one God who is everybody's God, as the sun is everybody's sun; one God of whose grace no one has a monopoly. Where God makes no distinction in his saving purpose, what ground has anyone to make distinction in his prayers?

(*b*) *He is also to pray for all men, "for there is . . . one mediator* also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." The universality of Christ's mediatorship affords a reason as urgent as it is cogent for the universality of prayer. Its implication is this: Pray for all men everywhere; for the despised classes, for the outcast classes, for the most debased and imbruted of men; pray for them because in Christ has been provided the means of their salvation; pray for them because your prayers may be one link in the chain of influences to bring them into the connection with the source of salvation.

To have the lips sealed, for any cause, against prayer for a single soul anywhere in God's universe, is to stand outside of his redeeming purpose. He prayeth best who loveth best the whole of human kind; and he most resembles God who has a wideness in his love like the wideness of the sea.

12. *The Anticipatory Element in Prayer.*

"In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4. 6). "The beginning of anxiety," says Andrew Murray, "is the end of faith"; and, *vice versa,* the beginning of faith is the end of anxiety. The prayer of faith is the grave of care. In everything pray, and care will take to itself wings and fly away. "Trouble and perplexity drive us to prayer and prayer driveth away trouble and perplexity."

Prayer and supplication are here conjoined, as they often are elsewhere in the Scripture. "Prayer" is the general word, and indicates communion with God in any of its aspects; "supplication" has reference to prayer for the supply of special wants. In everything we are to pray to God and supplicate his aid; praying with a purpose, making definite requests, asking specific blessings, and leaving, with a care-free heart, the disposal of things to his wisdom and love.

The qualifying phrase "with thanksgiving" is full of significance. The common explanation of these words is that thanks is to be given for past mercies,

before asking for more. This interpretation does not, however, exhaust the meaning of these words. The apostle clearly teaches that not for past mercies alone are we to give thanks, but also for mercies to come. He says, "with thanksgiving let your *requests* be made known unto God." The contention that thanksgiving relates to what God has done, prayer to what we hope he will do, does not always hold. Thanks may be given for things asked for and hoped for. If God's word is sure, it will be quite as appropriate to thank him for what is promised, as for what is already in hand. The prudential proverb, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," expresses a half truth at best. There are times when a thing asked for is as really ours as if in actual possession. To ask in faith is to bring into the enjoyment of the present all the anticipated wealth and glory of the future. In the proportion to the strength of faith will be the disposition to praise God before we have outward evidence that our requests have been granted. In his pledged word faith finds "the confident expectation of things hoped for."

The exhortation of the apostle is to unite prayer and supplication with thanksgiving "in everything." Nothing can be sought in prayer which God cannot supply. His treasures are inexhaustible, and they are ours in the measure in which we can receive and use them. Raised above all fear of want or failure we are therefore warranted in turning our every prayer into a hymn of praise.

To do this is simply to anticipate God. It is to thank him in advance, as we often do in our letters to those of whom we ask some personal favor. Anticipating God, we will rejoice in the coming shower before it falls; we will sing our pæan of victory before the battle is on; we will give thanks before the Red Sea of difficulty has been crossed; we will look confidently for a door of deliverance in the valley of Achor; yea, we will wait for the ultimate issue of every event with unfaltering faith, and while waiting to enter upon our reserved inheritance we will receive earnests of it. Our present experiences will be more than prophetic. The hope of complete fulfillment will sustain our fainting hearts as we tread the heavenward way. By forestalling the future we will glorify the present.

13. *Unceasing Prayer.*

"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5. 17). "Praying always" (Col. 1. 3). "Praying at all seasons" (Eph. 6. 18). These words must not be watered down to mean, Be always in the spirit of prayer. Their obvious meaning is, Offer unceasing supplication to God; let prayer flow upward to him in a constant stream; live in such unbroken connection with him that the most widely scattered prayers shall be as one.

In interpreting these words the mistake has been made of supposing that to pray without ceasing must always mean the conscious uplifting of the

heart to God in direct petition. We know that this is impossible. The soul cannot be always on the wing; its heavenward flight cannot be steadily maintained. It must sometimes touch the earth. "Prayer," says the poet Longfellow, "flieth incessant 'twixt the earth and the sky, the carrier pigeon of heaven"; but the strongest wing will grow weary. The uplifted hands which are long uplifted will hang down. As a specific act of devotion prayer will sooner or later come to an end; as a state of mind and heart it may continue without ceasing. Beneath the strata of the worldly thoughts and interests and activities may run the ever-flowing stream of holy desire. When the lips are mute the heart may speak; when the praying soul has spoken himself out and words refuse to flow, his prayer may continue.

(1) *The whole life may be in itself an unceasing prayer.* As Victor Hugo has said, "Whatever the attitude of the body, the soul may be upon its knees." And when the soul is upon its knees the life will be one living, breathing prayer. Along with a life of prayer there will be the prayer of a life. "When we have learned to offer up any duty connected with our situation in life as a sacrifice to God," says Thomas Erskine, "a settled employment just becomes a settled habit of prayer." In such a case prayer is as unceasing as life; it continues as long as life continues, and ends only when life itself ends.

Prayer being rooted in life, its formal expression

is simply the upthrusting of the subconscious self, the breaking of a bubble which rises from the soul's unfathomable depths; it may go on in the subconscious region when it has run out in conscious experience, just as love goes on in our sleeping and in our waking. This Mrs. Browning affirms in the lines,

> In a mother undefiled,
> Prayer goeth on in sleep, as true
> And pauseless, as the pulses do.

(2) *We may also pray without ceasing in the sense of cherishing a feeling of unbroken dependence upon God.* Prayer springs from the consciousness of creature insufficiency, coupled with a belief in Divine all-sufficiency. It is the turning of man in his emptiness to the source of his supply. Man prays because he finds himself inadequate to the things of life. Life's burdens are too heavy to be carried alone, life's problems are too hard to be solved alone, life's sorrows are too great to be borne alone, life's duties are too difficult to be performed alone.

In nothing is man sufficient unto himself; in no condition can he dispense with God. God is a felt necessity. Dependence is as real as existence. And what is prayer but his acknowledgment of his need of God? And what is unceasing prayer but his unceasing dependence on God's unceasing love, as he quietly rests in him as the underlying support of his life?

(3) *Above all, we are to pray without ceasing*

in the sense that we are to pray without ceasing to trust. One prayer is to be linked to another in a continuous chain of faith. There is to be no let-up to faith and hope, but a confident expectation that the things asked for will be granted. This is the vital thing in unceasing prayer. If faith fail not, prayer will be unceasing, however infrequently it is offered up; for, no matter how many interruptions come in to break up our devotions, we will always take up our prayer where we left it off. Our most fragmentary prayers will thus be united by a common faith into one continuous whole.

When a man plunges into business God is necessarily out of his immediate thought, and formal prayer is out of the question. The more absorbed he is in the matter in hand the less he will carry the deeper interests of life in mind; yet underneath all business strain and worry there may be a firm and unshakable faith in God touching the things which have been desired of him; and the faith which underlies life may join together its separate parts as a cable under the ocean connects widely separated continents. Or, to change the figure, what seemed a break in the symphony of life may in reality be a mere interlude between its parts.

No one ceases to pray who continues to trust. Parents pray for the conversion of a wayward child and see no results. Months change into years, and still the answer is delayed; yet if they continue to trust their covenant God, they are praying without ceasing. Assured that he has heard them, they

will abate no jot of heart and hope, but will turn to life's tasks, calmly waiting the working out of God's answer to their prayers. Christians pray for a revival of religion, and for a time nothing follows; but if they pray on, continuing to believe in God's love and power, at length the heavens will be opened and showers of blessing will descend upon the parched land.

When faith ceases prayer ceases. Without faith a man may continue to *say* his prayers, but he has ceased to *pray*. The only prayer that is real, and hence the only prayer that prevails, is the prayer that takes hold and keeps hold of God. "Prayer is heard in heaven," says Spurgeon, "in proportion to our faith. Little faith will get great mercies, but great faith still greater." The prayer that unceasingly repeats itself, and unceasingly prevails, is the prayer of unceasing faith.

14. *Prayer as a Habit.*

"I desire therefore that men pray in every place" (1 Tim. 2. 8). This being merely a variation of the foregoing thought, need not here be enlarged upon. It brings to view another form of continuous prayer. Prayer has not only all times and seasons for its own; it has all places for its own. The world is a temple, any spot thereon an altar. To every place heaven is equally near; and the flow of divine communion which a bustling world so often interrupts is liable to break out at any place where the need of God is felt. Dr. Horace Bushnell

testifies that he "fell into the habit of talking with God on every occasion. I talk myself asleep at night," said he, "and open the morning talking with him." This habit of connecting every part of the day with prayer ought to be sedulously cultivated. Yet the spontaneous upgoing of the soul to God must not be allowed to take the place of set times of prayer; for, as Juan de Avila wisely remarks, "No man will be able to pray with profit in *any* place unless first he have heart to pray in a *particular* place, and to employ some space of time therein."

15. *Looking for the Answer.*

"Praying . . . and watching thereunto" (Eph. 6. 18). When prayer has been offered we are to look for the answer, as the archer looks to see if his arrow has hit the mark; or as the person who knocks at the door looks for it to be opened.

The expression "watching thereunto" might be more strictly rendered "being sleepless thereunto." An alert, sleepless outlook is to be maintained until the answer comes. Too many go away from the throne of grace forgetting what they have come for; they have no real expectation of seeing anything happen as the result of their prayers; or, if for a time they look for an answer, by and by their interest slackens, their vigilance relaxes, or the distractions of life call off their thoughts from what they were seeking, and they cease to have expectation of anything definite coming to them.

To let go the expectant attitude is to suffer great loss. It is to empty life of one of the chief elements of its interest; it is virtually to say that there has come an end of God. To the praying man God himself is the real object of hope. The song of his life has for its refrain, "My soul, wait thou *only* upon God, for my expectation is from him." If God be the Infinite Good, there is every reason why he should expect great things from him; and if he has promised certain special and abundant blessings in answer to prayer, he has every reason to expect that they will be given. Hence it behooves him to keep looking for their coming.

It is hard to keep a steady watch, hard to curb our impatience when the things we were looking for seem to be delayed. Waiting tests our faith. Fain would we control God, instead of waiting patiently upon him to see what he is going to do. But we have to wait. When the tide is out there is nothing to do but to tarry for its return; when the night is dark there is nothing to do but to watch for the morning; when the powers of evil prevail there is nothing to do but to look for the glory of the coming of the Lord. "For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie; though it tarry, wait for it: because it will surely come, it will not delay" (Hab. 2. 3).

In watching for the answer we must look all around, for while we are looking for it in one direction it may be coming in another, and we may miss it. Standing upon our watchtower scanning the

horizon, we are to look in every direction, watching for the reenforcements which are on the way. God is faithful and will not leave a beleaguered soul unrelieved. Praying and watching will bring their reward. "Begin praying, continue watching, and you will end in praising."

CHAPTER II

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

THE unknown writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews approaches the subject of prayer from the standpoint of its relation to Christianity as the final religion. He sees in Judaism the bud of which Christianity is the full-blown flower. With him "Christianity is represented as sublimated, completed, idealized Judaism" (Farrer). Continuity and development mark the entire process of revelation. The Jewish ritualistic system was merely "a shadow of things to come." It contained "weak and beggarly elements" which passed away when that which is perfect arrived. Religion, stripped of its ceremonial character, became the free and spontaneous worship of God in the spirit. Prayer, like every other part of the religious life, came to its full stage of development. To every believer was accorded the privilege of access into the holy place and of immediate fellowship with God.

Writing to Jewish Christians, our author naturally employs thought-forms borrowed from Jewish sources. His imagery is Jewish, his thought is Christian.

1. *The Throne of Grace.*

"Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto

the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace to help us in time of need" (Heb. 4. 16). The word "therefore" is what has been called a reason-rendering particle. It has behind it a "because." *Because* we have a great High Priest, who was himself tried in the furnace of temptation, and who came out of it unscathed, *therefore* let us, through him, draw near with bold and joyous confidence unto the throne of grace. This the argument of the writer.

(1) *Observe to what we are to come*:

(*a*) *A throne.* A throne is the symbol of the highest earthly power. It is here the symbol of divine power. At the center of the universe there is a throne, the seat of order and government. The one who sits upon it holds in his hand the reins of universal dominion. Having absolute throne-power, he is able to do for those who come to him in prayer "exceedingly abundantly above all they ask or think."

> Thou art coming to a King,
> Great petitions with thee bring;
> For his power and love are such
> None can ever ask too much.

(*b*) *The throne of grace.* That is, the throne of which grace is the distinguishing quality; the throne established in grace; the throne from which grace is royally and righteously dispensed. It is to such a throne that we are invited to approach in prayer, the throne in which sovereign power and fatherly love are blended into one. From the throne of

divine majesty mortals shrink; from the throne of divine judgment sinners flee; to the throne of divine grace all gladly go. To such a throne they draw near with boldness; not the boldness of vain self-confidence, but the boldness which faith in God's graciousness inspires. Before that throne they humbly bow in the happy consciousness that the One who is seated upon it is their friend, who will not spurn their prayers, but will answer them "according to the exceeding riches of his grace."

(2) *What we are to get by coming to the throne of grace.*

(*a*) *Mercy.* To obtain this is the first object of our coming. Before we ask for anything else we are to ask for mercy to cover the sins of the past. It is a shallow philosophy, and an equally shallow experience, that ignores or denies the reality of sin, and hence the need of God's forgiving mercy.

A suppliant sinner can deal with God on no other footing than that of mercy. Merit is ruled out. He can claim nothing as a right, but must ask everything as a favor. The right of petition which is his as God's child must not blind him to the fact that as a prodigal child he must come confessing, "Father, I have sinned," and cast himself upon the Father's unpurchasable mercy.

> In the course of justice none of us
> Should see salvation; we do pray for mercy.

And at the throne of grace to which we are urged to come, mercy may be found when sought.

Apollonius is said to have prayed every day, "O ye gods, give me that which is my due." Better instructed he would have prayed, "O God, give to me that which is the very opposite of what is my due."

(*b*) *Grace to help in time of need.* By coming to the throne of grace not only are the sins of the past blotted out through the mercy of God, but grace is given to help us in all the upward struggle of the future. The grace which is the source of our salvation is also the source of our help. Not the smallest crumb is given because we deserve it. It comes to us as the expression of God's benevolent love to the undeserving, and the ill-deserving. It comes in abundant measure; and can meet to the full every possible demand. The forms in which it is given are as numerous and diversified as our needs. It is given as restraining grace, as constraining grace, as upholding grace, as enabling grace, and as overcoming grace. It is suited to every possible condition.

This all-sufficient grace is given for the asking. We are to come to the throne of grace to get it. It is given in answer to prayer in the measure in which we are prepared to receive it and to use it. Never can the need of it be outgrown.

> O, to grace how great a debtor
> Daily I'm constrained to be.

And because I need it daily I must ask for it daily, just as I ask for my daily bread.

2. *The Ever-Living Intercessor.*

"Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7. 25). According to the writer of this epistle, Christ is the ideal priest, superior to Aaron and every other priest, not being "compassed with infirmity," as the best of earthly priests are, but being personally perfect. He is also an eternal Priest, not being subject to death, but living for evermore to make intercession for his people.

As the high priest of humanity he is near to God, and thus in touch with all the sources of power. At his ascension he passed through the lower heavens to the highest heaven, into the immediate presence of God. There he abides, exercising his mediatorial power on behalf of those who are struggling here below with doubt, and fear, and sin. In that work he has been engaged since his ascension. His relation to men is unchanged, his interest in them is unabated; his sympathy toward them is undiminished. "The love that bled on the cross pleads on the throne."

Since the completion of his priestly sacrifice his intercession has acquired a new significance. Upon his atoning death his intercession rests. Just in what ways the benefits of his priestly intercession reach us it is difficult to understand. We know only in part. Influences are set in motion which lie beyond our ken. One benefit which is here

mentioned—and it is the greatest of all, the most inclusive of all—is that "we draw near to God through him." By his intercession he brings God and man together.

The question will no doubt be raised, Why is the intercession of Christ necessary? Is it necessary to move the Father's heart, or to change the Father's mind? Assuredly not. It is not a method of argument or persuasion; much less is it a legal formality. It is the kindly service of a friend at court. From it is to be eliminated much that pertains to intercession among men. It is not the pleading with one who requires to be won over, but the proffering of a request to a friend who delights to give. By it God and man are brought into a state of at-one-ment; heaven is opened, and kept open; a permanent channel of communication is established by which prayer ascends to heaven, and the fullness of God's love and saving grace descends unrestrictedly upon every receptive soul.

3. *A New Way of Approach.*

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in the fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water" (Heb. 10. 19-22).

The new dispensation, namely, the Christian dispensation under which we are now living, introduced a new conception of prayer. In the Gospels that new conception is represented as praying in the name of Christ, here it is represented as approaching God by "a *new* and *living* way," which Christ has opened for us into the holy place. In the Old Testament the approach to God was through the blood of animal sacrifices; here it is "through the blood of Jesus," or through the rent veil of his flesh; his death breaking down the barrier to communication with God, so that those who are in him are raised up with him into the heaven-life, and entering with him into the throne-room, have their intercessions taken up into his, and thus made prevailing.

This new conception of the approach of man to God in prayer is set forth in the Bible as the climax of a long process of historical development. In the beginning of things we find worship in its simplest and purest form as the free and happy converse of man with God. This is the meaning of the story of the Garden of Eden. It portrays a condition of direct and personal contact which did not last. Sin clouded the soul and drove man from the presence of God. As the sense of sin deepened, a sacerdotal system was evolved in which God was approached by propitiatory offerings. That system, with all its imperfections, had a distinct educational value; it led the thought of man by gradual stages to an understanding and appreciation of the new

and living way, by which the individual soul was to be brought into communion with God without the intervention of human priest or sacrifice.

The new way which has been opened, and in which we are now to walk, is said to have been "dedicated for us," that is, set apart for our use and benefit. We have, therefore, a right to use it. The privilege of approach, the freedom of access which it offers, belong to us, because they have been obtained for us through Him who is "the great high priest over the house of God." The way having been provided, how are we to enter it?

(1) *With boldness.* The boldness which we are assumed to possess is not irreverent, foolhardy boldness, but the boldness which springs from the knowledge that the way by which we come to God is free, that no one can bar us from it, or hinder us from entering it.

(2) *"With a true heart."* That is, with a sincere heart, a heart of truth, a heart true to its deepest convictions and to its highest ideals, a heart true to itself, and, because true to itself, true to God. God desires and demands of every suppliant "truth in the inward parts." He will turn away from that man who "pleads the cause wherein his tongue is confuted by his conscience" (Fuller); but he is "nigh unto all that call upon him in truth."

(3) *"In fullness of faith."* That is in a full-grown faith, springing out of a full-grown revelation. The passing away of the old ceremonial system which had stood for ages was disquieting

to faith; but since in its place came a better system, founded upon better promises, there was ground for the creation of a larger, stronger, and richer faith. To those who came into the knowledge of Jesus as the new way to God he became "the perfecter of faith." Through him they can draw near to God with a confidence never before possible. Doubt and hesitancy are taken away, and in the clearer light that has dawned there is produced "the full assurance of faith."

(4) *"With a cleansed heart."* "Having a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience," that is, from a conscience polluted by the guilt of sin. The purifications of the Levitical priesthood were legal and external; the purifications of the Christian priesthood are spiritual and internal. They have to do with the conscience, the center of moral personality, cleansing it from unholy affections; from pride, from selfishness, from malice, from sin of every kind, thereby making us fit "to appear before the face of God."

(5) *With a clean body.* "Having our body washed with pure water." This condition of approach had a meaning to the Jewish Christians which it has not to us. The things for which these ancient lustrations stood was the need of purity within and without. The outer life is to correspond with the inner. First a clean heart, then clean hands, or, rather, clean hands because a clean heart. "Who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" (Psa. 24. 3, 4).

To such alone the door of the inner shrine is opened.

4. *Things to be Assumed in Prayer.*

"He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him" (Heb. 11. 6). Two things are here assumed as belonging to acceptable and successful prayer, namely:

(1) *Belief in God's personal existence.* This is fundamental, for prayer is founded upon the reality of God. If a definition of prayer might be ventured upon, it might be said to consist of the reach of man after the Absolute Reality, and his conscious connection with that Reality. The praying soul must first of all believe that God *is;* he must look upon him as the eternally living and abiding One—immutable, unchangeable, the fixed center of the universe and the fixed center of his soul. Although he cannot see him, he must believe in him as the Infinite Spirit who is behind and in all things, and, assuming his existence, move toward him. He must deal with him at first hand, venturing himself upon him and opening up his heart to the incoming of his grace and power.

(2) *Belief in God's presence.* Those who believe that God is must also believe that he is present. According to Dr. Robert F. Horton, "Prayer is simply and solely the realization of God"—the awareness of his presence. It is more than that; but it is that in the first instance. To gain a realiz-

ing sense of God's presence is the first requisite in prayer.

(3) *Belief in the sufficiency of prayer*—belief not only in God's existence, and in his immediacy, but belief also in his friendliness; belief that he not only can help but that he is willing and ready to help. Out of the conviction of God's friendship prayer is born. Men draw near to God because they believe in his personal love, in the stability of his universe, in the reliability of his word, and in the certainty of his being fond of those who seek him. If they did not believe these things about him, they would not come to him in prayer.

The indispensable thing in connection with prayer, then, is faith. God is the recompenser of those who seek after him earnestly, perseveringly, and in faith. Faith pleases him, for what is it but taking him at his word? It sees the answer from afar, as given inwardly before it is given outwardly. Its accompanying signs are merely incidental. The treasures which it secures are the most precious that God can give, and make for the enrichment of life as outward things could never do. By lifting our thoughts above earth's cloudiness, it lightens our burdens, assuages our sorrows, dispels our fears, quickens our love, brightens our hopes, and changes our *De Profundis* into a *Gloria in Excelsis.*

CHAPTER III

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF JAMES

JAMES the Just, the Lord's brother, and head of the church in Jerusalem, was a man of crystalline purity. He was something of an ascetic, and lived a life of spiritual aloofness. Tradition has it that he prayed continually in the temple for the forgiveness of the people, spending whole nights in prayer, until his knees became hard as a camel's. With a spirit of devotion he combined a passion for righteousness, resembling in this respect one of the ancient prophets. His epistle, which supplies a high standard of Christian ethics, is the production of a pragmatist, who brings every doctrine to the touchstone of experience. To this test he subjects the subject of prayer, considering it in a practical way as related to daily life.

1. *Prayer for Wisdom.*

"If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting" (James 1. 5, 6).

(1) *Consider the hypothetical need.* "If any of you lacketh wisdom"—and who does not? "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." His

wisdom is not sufficient to solve the perplexing problems that confront him day by day. He needs a higher wisdom than his own to correct his judgments and enable him to make proper adjustments and appraisements, so that he may be able to match means to ends in securing the highest objects in life.

(*a*) *"This true wisdom is from above,"* and it is to be distinguished from that which is from below (3. 15-17). It does not come by nature. It is not earth-born. It has its origin in heaven. It gives us God's viewpoint touching the practical things of life.

(*b*) *It is "spiritual,"* and is to be distinguished from that which is "earthly, sensual, devilish." It has to do with things in the upper sphere, as earth-born wisdom has to do with things in the lower sphere.

(2) *How is it to be obtained?*

(*a*) *By asking it from God.* He is the fountain-head of wisdom. He is the only one who can guide man aright in the entanglements of life. He knows life's true goal, and he knows the way we can reach it.

(*b*) *By asking it from God with unshaken faith,* staggering not at the promise. Whoever prays without confidence cannot hope that his prayer will be granted.

(*c*) *By asking it with a single mind*—and not with two minds in conflict with each other. Doubt is fatal. He that doubteth is the sport of his own divided mind, being "like the surge of the sea,"

which the wind scatters into feathery foam. His divided mind breaks his prayer into atoms and keeps it from reaching the mark.

(3) *How is it given?*

(*a*) *Impartially.* "To all men," that is, to all men who feel and confess their need of it, and seek it in prayer from God the Giver.

(*b*) *Liberally.* Without stint; and with no limitations whatsoever except unwillingness or unreadiness to receive it.

(*c*) *Graciously.* Without upbraiding, either because one has asked too often or too much.

The gift of wisdom is not bestowed directly; it is not poured into the heart as water into a vessel; it comes through the operation of God's grace, in the enlightenment of our judgment touching the ordinary experiences of life. We pray to him for light, and trust in him for leading, and he makes us wise in his own wisdom—not worldly-wise but heavenly-wise—so that although we may appear to blunder, and may even be accounted the world's fools, yet, touching the supreme things, we shall make no mistake and shall receive the commendation of the Master of men for having chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from us.

2. *Unoffered and Unavailing Prayer.*

"Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures" (4. 2, 3). The two thoughts which are here presented are:

(1) *Loss from unoffered prayers.* "Ye have not, because ye ask not." Some things come without our asking; some things come by our asking. God wants to be asked; he waits to be asked; he loves to be asked; he encourages us to ask, that a new condition may be supplied which will enable him to give special and superabundant blessings, which he would otherwise have to withhold. Holy desires are awakened within us by the operation of his Spirit upon our hearts, that they may find voice in prayer. They are calls to prayer; and if any one turns a deaf ear to them, he is guilty of resisting the Holy Spirit.

We speak of the loss sustained by kind words unspoken and kind deeds undone; equally great is the loss sustained by prayers unprayed. We have not, and others have not, because the hand of restraint has been put upon the mouth of the soul, and the impulse to pray has been checked.

(2) *Loss from wrong prayer.* "Ye ask amiss," that is, ye ask with a wrong intent, from a wrong motive, and for an unworthy end, and thus miss the mark in prayer.

There are formal, foolish, selfish prayers, which fail to obtain an answer. When unanswered the reason is found in our praying and not in God's arbitrary withholding. If a wrong thing is asked, or a right thing is asked for a wrong purpose, our prayer is mercifully denied. When we pray, for instance, for wealth, that we may expend it in selfish and sinful gratification of the senses, God may deny our prayer, that he may save us from

our own undoing. Never can we know from what perils he may have saved us by winnowing out our prayers.

3. *God Meeting Man More Than Half Way.*

"Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh unto you" (4. 8). Prayer is not an individual act. It is something in which two are engaged—man and God. These two have reciprocal relations. When a man meditates or soliloquizes he is by himself; when he prays he is dealing with God, and God is dealing with him. Neither is passive; both make advances; both open themselves to each other; both seek to establish commerce between one another.

To this reciprocal relation and interaction between man and God in prayer the words before us refer. In them we have:

(1) *The movement of man Godward.* In prayer man is not only drawn upward to God, he *moves* upward to God. With an instinct strong and true as nature itself he seeks after him, and endeavors to come into direct and personal connection with him. He has been "organized for God" and can find his true life in him alone. He has wants which none but God can supply, desires which none but God can gratify. When his religious nature is awakened, an active, persistent search for God is begun, a search which is never ended until the object of his quest is found.

(2) *The movement of God manward.* This thought James emphasizes, making it the ground of

encouragement in prayer. "Draw nigh unto God, *and* he will draw nigh unto you." Every movement on man's part toward him is met by a more eager movement on his part toward man. The search of man after God is the underlying fact in all religions; the distinguishing glory of Christianity is that it alone presents the complimental truth of the search of God after man. It reveals him not as a retreating but as an approaching God, as a loving Father, who, when he hears the wail of his lost child, hastens to his side. According to Herrmann, prayer "must have direct relation to the fact that God turns to us, and not away from us." But not only does he turn to us, he follows hard after us, places himself at our side, and gives himself to us for the asking.

The conception of God drawing near to man is, of course, an accommodation to human limitations. We know that he is never remote. The world pulsates with his presence. Over every soul his Spirit broods; to every cry his ear is open. But while he does not require to come to us from a distance, he does draw near in the sense that he responds to our prayer. To every pulse-beat of our desire there is an instant answer in his eternal heart. In the fact that God is eternally near to man lies the possibility of his finding him. For, as Luther remarks, "Before thou callest upon him, or seeketh him, he must have come to thee, and found thee."

He will meet anyone that draws nigh to him more than half way, and will press up to him as

close as he will let him. If anyone turns to him, as the flower turns to the sun, the light of his countenance will shine upon him; if anyone opens the door of his heart to him, he will enter in, bringing the feast with him; if anyone will take one step forward, he will take two. And however blindly and stumblingly anyone may pursue his search, he cannot forever miss him, for a seeking God and a seeking soul must ultimately meet.

4. *The Therapeutic Value of Prayer.*

"Is any one among you suffering? let him pray" (5. 13). "Is any one among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him" (5. 14). "The prayer of faith shall save him that is sick" (5. 15). "Pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (5. 16). Speaking of prayer for the sick, Professor James says that "if any medical fact can be considered to stand firm, it is that in certain environments prayer may contribute to recovery, and should be encouraged as a therapeutic measure." To the same effect are the words of Dr. Hyslop, the celebrated English alienist, "To counteract the miserable sequels of a diseased mind I would give the first place to the simple habit of prayer." Prayer is conducive to health because the attitude of the mind which it demands reacts favorably upon the body. It has often very marked physical results. Its soothing, quickening, comforting influence is incalculable.

But its influence is not merely reflex. It is posi-

tive and direct. It affects the body not only through the law of suggestion but by opening the soul to the source of power, not in passive receptivity, but in active appropriation, so that as Sir Oliver Lodge affirms "in prayer we are approaching the quickening springs of the life of the flesh," and are thus putting ourselves into the proper attitude to receive an inflowing of divine energy. We virtually give an invitation to the Infinite Life, with which connection has been made, to enter the soul, and work within it and through it with all his healing, recreative power.

According to the teaching of James, the removal of sickness is for a moral end. Nothing is said by him to warrant the belief that the recovery of the sick will always take place in answer to prayer; for if that were so, sickness would be soon banished from the world. The following conditions of prevailing prayer are clearly indicated:

(1) *The person who is sick must put himself in a right spiritual attitude.* He must confess his sins, not his crying sins only, but his secret faults. He must get right in heart with man and God. Tertullian has well said that his confession, if real, will be prompted by the desire to make amends. Without honest confession—not necessarily the auricular confession to a priest, but the confession of one Christian brother to another—no prayer for recovery will prevail.

(2) *If his sickness is a result of sin, his sin must be repented of and forgiven before his healing can*

take place. The statement "If he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him," shows that repentance must do its work in bringing him into the right attitude before God.

(3) *He must desire to be healed.* That desire is expressed in sending for the presbyters of the church—representative men of faith and spiritual-mindedness—to pray for him.

(4) *The prayer offered on his behalf must be the prayer of a righteous man,* that is, a man who shows his faith by his works; a man, who, because he is right with God, is in such close touch with him as to be sensitive in every fiber of his being to divine impression, and in the fullest harmony with his perfect will.

(5) *He must make use of the best means available*—administering medical agencies in faith; in this case anointing with oil, not as "a sign of grace" but because of its supposed therapeutic value; the efficacy, however, being in the oil by reason of the divine power working through it. It is "the prayer of faith" that saves the sick; and the oil, while used as a curative agent, is applied "in the name of the Lord."

(6) *The prayer offered for the sick must be "the prayer of faith."* It must be born out of the conviction that for good and valid reasons of his own God desires the recovery of the one who is sick. This was the attitude of Luther when told that his friend Myconius lay apparently dying. Immediately he fell upon his knees and began to pray, "O

Lord, my God. No! thou must not take yet our brother Myconius to thyself. Thy cause will not prosper without him. Amen." Luther sought the recovery of his sick friend that his restored life might be given to the cause of Christ. God honored his prayer because its end was spiritual.

When, therefore, anyone prays that a friend may be cured of sickness, he should, when urging his request, leave God to judge whether the prolongation of his life would be for his glory and for the highest good of all concerned. Meyer reminds us, with regard to the declaration that "the prayer of faith shall save the sick," that "the assurance of healing is given in an absolute way; but that all such sentences, with regard to the removal of physical evil, need to be interpreted with a constant remembrance of the supremacy of the will and wisdom of God." Hence it is meet and right to leave every case to the disposal of the All-Knowing and All-Loving; and to have subtending every petition the expressed or implied condition, "Not my will, but thine be done."

5. *Prayer as a Working Force.*

"The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working" (5. 16). The reading of the Authorized Version, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," carries with it the implication that it is the fervency of prayer that renders it effective. There can be no doubt, however, that the reading of the Revised Version, which

sets forth the prayer of a righteous man as an active force working for the accomplishment of definite ends, in the sphere of things within which it operates, is the correct one. The supplication of a righteous man energizes powerfully, and "availeth much in its working." As the Cambridge Bible puts it, "It is of great might in its working." Three things are here plainly asserted regarding such prayer: (1) It *availeth*. (2) It availeth *much*. (3) It availeth much *in its working*. It is active and operant, practical and efficient. It is one of the mightiest factors by which the divine purpose of redemption is wrought out. From the moment it is offered up it begins to work. It introduces into the spirit-world a new condition of divine action; it creates a new center of power, it sets in motion a new moral potency; it brings to bear upon some point in the world's life a new healing, saving influence; it accomplishes something which was before impossible. No true prayer ever returns void to the one who offers it up. After it is made it goes beyond his reach, working in spheres to which his personal influence could not extend, and accomplishing results for which his personal power could not account.

An illustration how spiritual forces operate, and of how far-reaching their effects may be in the physical realm, is furnished by James in the case of Elijah, in answer to whose prayer the heavens were in turn sealed and opened. This man who tapped the source of power, and achieved results which

only the working of Omnipotence can explain, is said to have been "a man of like passions with us"—a frail, ordinary mortal. But while an ordinary man, his prayer was not ordinary. It had behind it a divine warrant, the cosmic changes asked for being in harmony with "the word of Jehovah." The prayer was inwrought by the Divine Spirit, and was clearly in the line of God's revealed purpose. The thing prayed for was also sought from a high motive, namely, that he might have an evidence of his prophetic mission that would bring confusion upon the wicked king Ahab and honor upon the cause of Jehovah.

Here we have brought to view the only satisfactory solution of the relation of prayer to material things, namely, that the material is always subordinate to the spiritual, and any temporal benefit asked for is denied or given in order that some spiritual end may be gained. Elijah apparently prayed for control of the forces of nature; what he really prayed for was that the forces of nature might be operated according to the divine will, for the highest spiritual ends. His prayer was answered because it was offered in the will of God and in harmony with his purpose.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF PETER

PETER, the leader and spokesman of the apostolic band, was as much a man of prayer as he was a man of action. His association with the Master had impressed him profoundly with the importance of prayer. He had listened to the Master's teachings on the subject; he had also been witness to its power in the life of the Master himself. He had been with him at Cæsarea Philippi, when in the hour of his deepest dejection he received strength in prayer to enable him to bear his burden to the end. He had been with him on Mount Hermon, when he was transfigured in prayer and for a brief moment had shone in the light of his heavenly glory. He had been with him in the garden of Gethsemane, when in the agony of his final passion he had prayed himself into perfect acquiescence with the divine will. He had also been with him in his farewell meeting with his disciples, when he committed them to the keeping of the Father and prayed that they might be a holy and united people. In all these experiences there must have developed within him an ever-deepening sense of the worth of prayer as an element of power in a victorious life.

In his own life prayer played no small part. To

its helpful ministry he owed much. In a never-to-be-forgotten hour, when his feet were slipping over the brink, the Master prayed for him that his faith might not fail, and he was held back from utter ruin. After the Lord's departure he was present in the upper room to wait in obedience to the Lord's command for the advent of the Spirit. Of that company he was doubtless the prayer leader. Afterward he proved the power of prayer in many ways. Through his prayer Dorcas was restored to life; and he himself was prayed out of prison by the disciples. It was also as he was praying on the roof of Simon the tanner's house at Joppa, in a time of great conflict of soul, that the vision came to him, which gave him a broader view of Christ and his kingdom, and fitted him to proclaim a world-wide evangel for a worldwide conquest.

Besides influencing Luke in writing his Gospel, which gives us the praying Christ, Peter makes his own contribution to the subject of prayer in words which are the evident fruit of his own experience. The aspects of this subject which he presents are the following:

1. *The Priesthood of Believers.*

"Ye also, as living stones, are built up a living house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2. 5). With the introduction of Christianity the priestly office and the bloody sacrifice passed away. The priestly office passed away be-

cause every Christian had become a priest; the bloody sacrifice passed away because the High Priest of humanity had given himself, once for all, for the sin of the world. Instead of a select priestly order we now have a universal priesthood of believers; and instead of slain animals laid upon smoking altars we have spiritual sacrifices—sacrifices which have a spiritual quality, sacrifices which come from the heart rather than from the hand.

Sacrifice of some kind every priest must offer, for sacrifice is an essential element in priesthood. The sacrifices of this new priesthood, while spiritual, are not on that account shadowy or imaginary. They are real sacrifices. Whatever be their outward form, they are sacrifices of self and sacrifices of life. They consist in part in the sacrifice of prayer, which is the chief function of the priestly office. The Christian priest, "joined to the Lord in one spirit," expresses in his intercession for others Christ's priestly sympathy and love. His prayer is a holy, love-lit flame kindled at the fire of the Lord's passion; it is a costly sacrifice, "an odor of a sweet smell, acceptable, well-pleasing unto God."

The priesthood of believers is a holy priesthood. The Jewish priest had to have an unblemished body, the Christian priest has to have an unblemished soul. As the secret sin of Lancelot rendered futile his quest for the Holy Grail, so sin harbored in the heart renders futile every prayer. Prayer to avail must come from clean lips and from a clean heart.

2. A Hindrance to Prayer.

"To the end that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Pet. 3. 7). The hindrances to prayer are legion. Here the reference is to a particular hindrance. Peter affirms that if a Christian man, in the tender and intimate relations of domestic life, does not show due consideration to those dependent upon him, and especially if he is not thoughtful, kind, and chivalrous in his conjugal relations, living with his wife on the higher plane, as being a joint-heir with her of the grace of life, showing her in all things proper respect and honor as "the weaker vessel," his prayers will be hindered; that is to say, they will be kept from mounting to the throne of grace, either dying upon his lips or dying by the way.

To be guilty of any inconsistency whatsoever, to live below the line of the Christian ideal, is to have prayer muffled and choked, or kept from reaching the mark. Careless living leads to ineffectual praying. It is the life that prays, and "he who would pray well must live well." When anything that ought to be rendered others is held back prayers are held back.

To pray while living in wrongdoing is to spread sail while leaving the anchor unlifted. A man cannot let himself out in a free and glad communion with God unless he is living in obedience to his will in all things. And should he force himself to pray before putting himself right with man and

God, squeezing out reluctant words by the pressure of a sense of duty, his prayer will be hindered from finding the goal and securing the answer.

3. *A Listening God.*

"The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplication" (1 Pet. 3. 12).

In these words, which Peter freely quotes from Psa. 34. 15, the divine side of prayer is brought to view. We have an all-seeing, all-knowing, all-hearing God, whose eyes overlook the righteous, taking note of all their movements and taking note of all their needs, and whose ears are open to their supplications (literally, directed toward their supplications), being eagerly bent to catch the faintest whisper of desire that comes from their lips.

The Eternal Father is never too busy to attend to the prayers of his children. The affairs of the universe do not absorb his attention so that he cannot give heed to the affairs of the individual soul. The infinitely small comes just as truly within the circle of his interest as the infinitely great. Everything that concerns his children is to him a matter of concern. Against no cry of need are his ears closed. When from the remotest corner of the earth the humblest and most unworthy creature of his hand calls upon him, he "stills the harps of angel bands to hear the suppliant sigh." From no one does he ever turn away.

The context shows that the assurance of God's special providence, and of his accessibility to the

suppliant, is given to the righteous to enable them to realize a happy and satisfying life. Because his eyes are favorably directed toward them they are of all men most blessed. Life has no sweeter solace, no more satisfying delight than that which comes from the knowledge of God's fatherly care and his readiness to listen to every supplication that may arise from our burdened hearts.

4. *Sobriety of Spirit in Prayer.*

"Be sober unto prayer" (1 Pet. 4. 7). The interpretation of these words which have narrowed them down to the abstinence from wine, or from sexual indulgence, is faulty in the extreme. They have a much wider application. They were written in view of the end of the Jewish age which was at hand, and which seemed to Peter "the end of all things," to exhort the followers of Christ to be temperate or self-controlled, so that they might continue in the spirit of prayer. The social break-up which was about to take place would be accompanied with great moral disorder. Men would throw the reins upon the wild horse of their passions, and give way to every indulgence. From all such excesses Christians were rigidly to abstain. They were to hold their passions in leash, and preserve a frame of mind leading up to prayer, and not away from it. By achieving self-control they were to manifest in all things a sobriety of spirit favorable to devotion.

These words, therefore, put a ban upon everything savoring of levity, flippancy, and irreverence.

Christians are not to be intoxicated with worldly gayety, plunging into the whirl of social dissipation, and rushing heedlessly from it into God's presence. They are to avoid what Brother Lawrence describes as "amusing themselves with trivial devotions," and are not to be found guilty of the shamelessness of quitting converse with God "to think of trifles and follies." Rather are they to come into God's august presence in a thoughtful mood, curbing their wayward and wandering thoughts by strenuous effort of the will, and setting themselves in order to listen quietly and reverently to his voice. Boisterousness of manner, extravagance of speech, and ebullition of feeling are here condemned. The praying soul is not to lose hold of the rudder of his will and allow himself to be swept away on the tide of his emotions. He is to be self-restrained, humble and chastened in spirit, simple and sincere in his speech to God. He is to obey the injunction, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccl. 5. 2).

CHAPTER V

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF JOHN

To "the disciple whom Jesus loved" the religious life naturally presented itself in terms of personal friendship. Beginning with divine union, it is consummated in divine communion. "Our friendship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," is the keynote of his teaching.

It was to this high plane that John lifted the exercise of prayer. It was not an official act like that of a priest, but something natural, familiar, and free, like the act of a child. The word *orato,* which he uses for "prayer," is the word which is employed in reference to the praying of Jesus to the Father. The idea which it conveys is not that of entreating or beseeching, but of asking or requesting. "It suggests," says Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, "not the petition of some one who seeks for something as a favor, but the petition of one who is on a perfect equality with the person to whom it is presented." When the more insistent word *aieto,* "to ask," or "crave," is employed, there is still the idea of friendly intercourse with one willing and ready to give.

The references to prayer in John's Gospel have already been considered. Let us now glance at what is said on the same subject in his other reputed writings.

1. *Oneness with the Divine Will.*

"Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight." (1 John 3. 21, 22). "And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him." (1 John 5. 14, 15). When the manifold objects of human desire and pursuit are reduced to one—the will of God—the problem of life and the problem of prayer are simplified. Prayer has then for its object the bringing of the human will into union with the will of God; or as Dr. A. M. Fairbairn expresses it, "the establishing of harmony between two wills—God's and man's." We wait upon God to know his will and to become pliant to its demands. Our prayer is not an effort to change his mind and will, but an effort to bring our minds and wills into accord with his. Its object, as Bishop Hall has said, "is not to bend God's will to ours, but to raise ours to God; it is not to change but to accomplish the divine purpose." We are prone to go back on God when he refuses us anything, just as the heathen have been known to beat their gods when their prayers were unanswered. All this is changed when we see that prayer is not the defeat of the Father's will by his importunate child, but the complete submission and surrender of the

human will to the divine, the harmonizing of the human will with the divine. That this may be reached the history of religious experience testifies. Accepting the divine will in all things, the heathen philosopher Marcus Aurelius exclaimed, "O universe, all that thou wishest, I wish." Rabbi Gamaliel is reported to have prayed, "O Lord, grant that I may do thy will as if it were my will, that thou mayest do my will as if it were thy will." And Jonathan Edwards has the following entry in his Diary: "Resolved never to count that as a prayer, nor to let that pass as a prayer, or as a petition of a prayer, which is so made that I cannot hope that God will answer it."

In Christian prayer the desire for confirming to the Father's will is most pronounced. It underlies all formal requests. Nothing is wanted by the child which the Father has not planned for him. His blessedness in prayer, as in everything else, is in choosing the Father's good and acceptable and perfect will.

Believing that the All-Wise is administering the affairs of the world according to a plan which is too large for his finite comprehension, he adjusts himself to things as he finds them, and steadfastly resists every selfish prompting to pray that the entire order of the universe may be reversed for his special benefit. He has no desire to escape what others have to endure, and enjoy what others are denied. His attitude is that expressed in the lines of Phœbe Cary,

I ask that not for me the plan
Of good and ill be set aside,
But that the common lot of man
Be borne and glorified.

But, according to John, more is involved in prayer than "asking according to his will": an equally essential condition is that "we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight." It is not enough that his will is accepted; it must be carried out. It must energize in and through all the activities of life. Work and prayer must be as one. Both are parts of life, and in their union express its fullness.

2. A Limit to Prayer.

"There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request" (1 John 5. 16). John here draws a contrast between "a sin unto death" and "a sin not unto death," or between what has been called venial and mortal sin, and says that the former is to be prayed for, and the latter not. The reason for this is obvious. A sin unto death is a sin against the Spirit's saving light, and not a sin of ignorance; and as such it is one which God's mercy cannot overlook. The man who commits it breaks out of the circle within which the forgiving grace of God operates. It is not unpardonable, for no sin is that; but it is forever unpardoned, because it implies a state of heart which precludes the very possibility of pardon.

The reason why we are not to pray for this sin,

then, is simply this: that it would be unbecoming to ask God to forgive the impenitent. To pray that the impenitent may be led to repentance would be a proper prayer; but no pious soul would ask God to forgive those who refuse to yield to the sweet and suasive influences of the Spirit. Prayer is to be restrained in the presence of this sin, not because there is a limit to the saving mercy of God, not because an ultimate moral state has been reached from which there can be no recovery, but because the impenitent heart is not in a condition to receive forgiveness.

3. *A Striking Prayer.*

"Beloved, I pray that in all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John, verse 2). This friendly greeting which John sends to "Gaius the beloved" shows that he was sure of his spiritual welfare, and with that he wished his outward welfare to correspond. How badly some would fare if soul-prosperity were made the measure of worldly prosperity! "This," says Jay, "would be a dreadful rule to many; for if their bodies were to be as healthful as their souls, their dwelling would be a hospital, their bed of ease a bed of languishing; they would be blind, for they have no spiritual understanding; deaf, for they never hear the voice of God; dead, for the Spirit of the living God is not in them." Of course the correspondence between the bodily and the spiritual states can in any case be only partial. The

holiest often suffer most and the notoriously wicked often flourish as a green bay tree. Still, there is a general law which harmonizes the inward with the outward, and makes it meet to pray that the one who has inward good may be blessed with outward good.

4. *Prayers Treasured Up.*

"Golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5. 8). In this text we have a suggestion of the enduring power of prayer. The fragrant incense which fills the golden censers swung by the living creatures and the angels before the Lamb, is symbolic of the treasured-up prayers of God's people, which are held by him in everlasting remembrance. These prayers are not the intercessions of the glorified saints for the church on earth; nor are they works of supererogation by eminent saints put to the credit of others; they are the prayers offered on earth by all who were washed in the blood of Christ and who prayed in his name. Not one of them is forgotten by God. The answer to them may often be delayed, and may come long after they have been forgotten by those who offered them up; but it will be sure to come, for, as Dr. Horace Bushnell has said, "All true prayer is immortal, a living power that never dies or goes out; and that sends out its fire into the earth forever after."

Prayer is not ended when it is uttered. It is a stored-up force which can never be exhausted. To

the power of prayer no bonds can be set. The influence which it puts in motion can never die. It is a living force which enters into the life of the world, uniting the past and the present, linking us on to those we never knew, and perpetuating our influence after we have gone. By it we can bequeath a heritage of blessing to those who come after us, and by it we can receive a heritage of of blessing from the successive generations of praying souls who have passed on before us.

O, what volumes of prayer seem to remain unanswered! But not one of them is ever really lost. The prayer of the sainted father or mother still lives, and works on in behalf of the children for whom it was offered up. When we come to stand before the Lord, and the seals of the mysterious Book of Life are opened, it will be seen that not one prayer fell to the ground, but that every true prayer became an integral part of the divine moral order.

5. *The Final Prayer of the New Testament.*

"Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22. 20).

As this book closes, the risen, living Lord exclaims, "Yea; I come quickly," and the seer of Patmos sends the answer back, "Amen: come, Lord Jesus." This prayer for the coming of the Lord expresses the desire and hope of the early church in view of the desolating judgments which had already broken out, and which were to "shake terribly the earth." The furnace of persecution was being heated sevenfold, and no one could feel sure of

escaping its devouring flames. So severe was the sifting process that Jesus asks, "When the Son of man cometh, will he find faith on the earth?" What the final issue of the struggle would be no one could forecast. In their distress they called upon their absent Lord. They believed that he still lived and loved, and that he would speedily come for their deliverance. Upon his personal and speedy return all their hopes were centered. The prayer for his coming was constantly upon their lips.

The church, as the bride, is still to maintain this waiting, expectant attitude. She is to keep looking for great things from her Lord. She is to pray for his coming, not in outward, spectacular ways, but in the manifestation of his kingly power and glory. To him she is eternally united, and out of every struggle he will bring her triumphant. And so, whatever the specialized form of her prayer for his coming may be, the essence of it, the heart of it, will be a prayer for his coming in the glory of his power, and in the fullness of his kingdom.

And just as the Revelator turned the promise of the Lord into a prayer, so we are warranted in turning our prayer into a promise; so that when out of the depths we cry, "Come, Lord Jesus," we may hear the hope-inspiring reply, "Yea, I come quickly."

PART FIFTH
THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

CHAPTER I

PERSONAL PRAYER

O, where are kings and empires now,
Of old that went and came?
But Lord, thy church is praying yet,
A thousand years the same.

THE Church of Christ has always been a praying body. Sometimes the rains that fill the springs have for a season ceased to fall, and the river of her prayer-life has run low; but when things have come to the worst the spirit of prayer has again been poured out, and a revival of religion has followed.

Knowing the worth of prayer, the church has always sought to promote its practice among her members. She has inculcated the duty and magnified the privilege of prayer; she has depended upon it as a vital factor in her life. Some of her best efforts have been put forth in its cultivation. In her teaching and preaching, in her literature and art, in her music and hymnology, she has striven to uplift the hearts of men heavenward, and to connect them with the source of their life in prayer. There is no phase of the prayer-life to which she has been indifferent, and there is no aid to devotion which she has not endeavored to employ. A consideration of her efforts in this direction will bring before us a review of the various forms in which the

devotional life has formed expression. It will represent the church as praying "with all prayer and supplication," that is, with every form and variety of prayer and supplication.

1. *Private Prayer.*

This is the beginning and fountainhead of all that pertains to the spiritual life; for as religion consists in personal relations between man and God, its perpetuation and growth are conditional upon the cultivation of that relationship, and to this nothing conduces more than the practice of private prayer. When private prayer becomes a lost art spiritual life declines. The real strength of the church has always come from her praying members; by them her connection with God has been kept open, her worship saved from becoming mechanical, and her ministries from becoming ineffective.

It is a sad day for the church when those who compose her fellowship do not take time for private devotions. And never was the need for times of retirement more pressing than in these days of social delirium, and of fierce business competition, with their resultant nervous overstrain.

The call for times of retirement grows increasingly urgent. Without them the upper springs run dry, the tree decays at the root, and religious activities become superficial. As the height to which the pile-driver is raised determines the force of the descending blow, so the height to which we rise in fellowship with the Eternal determines the effec-

tiveness of our service. Power for service comes to those who tarry long in the secret place of the Most High.

2. Silent Prayer.

This is prayer before speech, prayer without speech, prayer that forever remains unspoken. It is a small part of one's praying that gets voiced in words. Heart-prayer has a larger place in Christian experience than oral prayer. But heart-prayer differs from mere silence. It is real prayer, prayer through inward speech to God, prayer in which the heart speaks while the lips are silent—a spirit-voice audible to the Father of spirits.

In the Old Testament we find the oft-repeated exhortation, "Be silent before him." This is a call to still all outward voices, that we may hear him whispering within. But sometimes, as Savonarola has said, "We are so busy talking to him that we have no time to hear him." He has something to say to us that he wishes to communicate to us directly; he wants us to wait for his message, to wait silently, collectedly, trustfully, submissively; to wait without complaint, without impatience, without wavering; and to wait, above all, in glad expectancy.

The mystics have made much of silent, wordless prayer. They have spoken of going into the silence, "the awful silence of God." They have held that prayer has four degrees: the first being simple, mental prayer; the second, the prayer of quiet; the third, the prayer of union; the fourth, the prayer of

rapture or ecstasy. "The prayer of quiet," says Saint Teresa, "is when the soul understands that God is so near to hear that she need not talk aloud to him."

In this noisy, loquacious age the practice of the prayer of silence is greatly needed. Never was counsel more timely than this: "Call in your heart, commune oft with yourself and with God; be less abroad, more within, more alone" (Leighton). Wait with hushed heart for the Father's voice. Wait in silence when you come to a point where speech is vain. That soul is poor indeed whose experience does not at times transcend the use of words. In the heart are unutterable things. What lover can tell all his love? And what prayer can express all the need and longing of a heart? Love gives to God perfect understanding. "He listens to the very breathing of our hearts" (Bushnell). "He is never deaf but when man's heart is dumb" (Francis Quarles). He interprets the spirit's voice when the lips are mute.

> And when in silent awe we wait,
> And word and sign forbear,
> The hinges of the golden gate
> Move soundless to our prayer.

3. *Ejaculatory Prayer.*

"Prayer darted up to heaven on emergent occasions"—prayer that leaps from the heart as we follow the plow, bend over the desk, toil in the workshop, or follow any of life's avocations.

And not alone in emergencies, or in the strain or struggle of life, is there to be the momentary uplifting of the heart, and the going up of an inarticulate cry for help. Every new circumstance that arises should call forth a prayer. The habit should be formed of talking to God about everything. And as the habit grows the sending upward of arrowlike petitions will take place without conscious effort, and ejaculatory prayer will become free, spontaneous, and unconstrained, as all prayer should be.

4. *Oral Prayer.*

This is of two kinds—occasional prayer, and prayer at set times. All men have had crises and exigencies in their lives when they "have caught at God's skirts and prayed." Prayer is often forced out of the soul by the pressure of some great trial; it is often the last resource in the stress of some great need. There are conditions of life when the only thing left to do is to pray.

The other kind of prayer, namely, prayer as a fixed habit, is prayer in its usual and normal form. A praying man is one who in the practice of prayer ties himself down to stated times and seasons; he is one who by acts of repetition cuts channels into which the stream of his prayer may be directed. When his interest fluctuates, and he does not feel inclined to pray, he will still keep up the habit, knowing that the less inclined he is to pray the more does he need to pray. "If a man does not pray at definite times, and that daily," says Dr. Alexander McLaren, "he

may talk as he likes about all life being worship, but *any* time will soon come to be *no* time."

All the great religions have felt the necessity of appointing fixed hours for prayer; and to the faithful observances of these prescribed times of prayer they have largely owed their perpetuation. The Jews were enjoined to pray three times a day, namely, at the third, the sixth, and the ninth hours, and for a time the Jewish converts to Christianity, remaining as they did within the pale of Judaism, followed that custom. And if Christianity laid down no set times and seasons, it was because every one was expected to do that for himself. He might, in the freedom of the spirit, elect to pray at the opening and closing of the day, or "at evening, at morning, and at noonday"; but at his soul's peril he dare not neglect to keep up the habitual practice of prayer.

It is significant how little Jesus has to say about the technique of prayer, his instruction on this point being confined to one lesson. It was evidently his design that we should learn to pray just as we learn to speak or to walk. It is an open question how far forms of prayer are helpful; and the fact that they have not been provided shows that they are not indispensable. While their use is not forbidden, on no account must they be allowed to impede the movements of the free spirit. As crutches for the infirm and the lame, prayer-forms may often be of great service; but prayer at its highest transcends the use of set forms, and is the natural expression of

personal desire, offered up in the joy and liberty of conscious fellowship with God.

Only the merest hints are given of how prayer began to shape itself in the early church. In 1 Tim. 2. 1 we find what is perhaps the earliest rudiments of an order of prayer; namely, "supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings"; but this list is by no means complete. No stereotyped order is to be followed; yet it is generally agreed that prayer contains the following constituent elements:

(1) *Adoration.* This primary feeling comes from a contemplation of the character of God. Worship is worth-ship. Mingled feelings of awe and fear, of wonder and love, take possession of the praying soul, as the vision of God's essential glory breaks upon his sight. All that is within him goes out to bless and magnify his holy name.

(2) *Thanksgiving.* Ascriptions of praise, born of a realization of what God is, are followed by "thankful acknowledgement of his mercies," past and present. The feeling of gratitude is heightened by a sense of personal unworthiness. God's gifts are gifts of grace—"mercies," favors bestowed upon the undeserving; and as such they call for thankfulness unmeasured.

(3) *Confession.* This should be sincere and heart-deep. It should also be explicit; being the confession not of sinfulness but of sin in particular. The confessor should say, with Achan, "Thus and thus have I done"; or, with the penitential psalmist, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done

this evil in thy sight." From such confession comes comfort. "We show God in confession our souls as we see them," says Dr. A. M. Fairbairn, "that he may show them to us as he sees them."

(4) *Petition.* This is the most conspicuous element in prayer. It takes on various forms, and exists in various degrees of intensity. It may be the simple expression of a *wish,* as in 2 Cor. 13. 7—"Now we pray that ye do no evil." It may be the offering up of a specific and heartfelt *desire,* as in Luke 22. 32, when the Master says to Peter, "I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not." It may mean asking, craving, begging, as in the words, "Of which of you that is a father shall his son ask a loaf, and he give him a stone?" (Luke 11. 11.) It may mean the confidence and freedom in making *requests* that belong to filial relations, as in 1 John 5. 14, "This is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." It may also mean interceding in the sense of pleading or entreating in behalf of others, as in the exhortation of Paul that intercessions be made for all men (1 Tim. 2. 1). The separate Greek words employed in these cases present finely shaded varieties of thought, but in them all the petitioning element is present. Something is desired, something is asked for. Definite and particular requests are made, in the assurance that God will be moved by the prayer of his children, and that what is sought will be given.

(5) To these four elements should be added a

fifth, namely, *Communion*. A praying man is not always asking or beseeching, often times he is simply communing; or, as the Mystics would say, "engulfed in God." He has no special request to make. He wants God himself, and he opens his soul to him as the flower to the sun. If he has the consciousness of his presence, he wants nothing more. His attitude may be illustrated by that of one of Mr. Moody's children, a boy of five, who came into his study one day as he sat writing. Unwilling to be interrupted, the father asked, gruffly, "What do you want?" "Nothing except to be with you, father," replied the child. There are times when to be in fellowship with the heavenly Father is all that his praying child desires. In the joy of communion he may even forget to refer to him the things with which his heart is burdened.

If, in the act of prayer, the outward form and arrangement of words is immaterial, much more is the attitude of the body. In the New Testament we find every conceivable posture adopted. Some of these were evidently taken over from other religions. The three prevailing postures were:

(*a*) *Standing*. As in Mark 11. 25, where Jesus says, "Whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any one." This attitude was sometimes accompanied by the lifting up of the hands (1 Tim. 2. 8), or by the lifting up of the eyes (John 11. 4). It is the only posture found in early Christian art, as represented in the Catacombs. To stand erect with bared head in the presence of

God is expressive at once of dignity and reverence.

(*b*) *Kneeling.* As in the case of Jesus (Luke 22. 41); of Stephen (Acts 7. 30); of Paul (Acts 3. 14); and of Peter (Acts 9. 40). The kneeling posture, which is now the prevailing one, is humble and reverential, the bending of the knees being symbolical of the bending of the heart before God.

(*c*) *Prostrating.* Falling on the face upon the ground in agony, or under tense emotion, as in the case of Jesus, when in the garden of Gethsemane he "fell on his face, and prayed" (Matt. 26. 39). This posture is generally expressive of extreme self-abasement or of overwhelming awe.

But while all of these postures are in their place seemly and fitting, no particular posture has been prescribed. "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3. 17). There is a holy indifference to the attitude of the body, the state of the heart toward God being the one thing essential.

Everything goes to show that nothing that is outward belongs to the essence of religion. "The fashion" or outward form of religion passes away; only that which is spiritual endures. Not the form but the spirit of prayer is the thing of supreme concern. We may cultivate correct forms without developing the prayer spirit; and, on the other hand, the form may be faulty and the language lame, yet the prayer may be full of power. Better dispense with form altogether than that prayer should become formal and mechanical. "When thou prayest," says

Bunyan, "rather let thy heart be without words than thy words without heart." We are not to "pray by heart, but with the heart." But the ideal condition is that in which the heart and the mouth are in accord; and the words of the mouth and the thoughts and feelings of the heart are alike acceptable unto God.

CHAPTER II

FAMILY PRAYER

THE family is the social unit, and family prayer is the form in which the social instinct, when touched by religion, begins to function. Family prayer is something to which the Spirit of God invariably prompts, and hence something for which a positive command would be superfluous. When two Christian people unite together in holy wedlock, and begin home building, their first and deepest impulse is to erect a family altar. Alas that this heaven-born impulse should be so often stifled!

The place which the family occupies in the Christian economy has great need of being clearly defined in the present day. We have come to give such prominence to individualism in religion that the relation of the family to God's plan is scarcely any longer thought of, and yet no Scripture truth shines out more luminously than that families in their corporate character sustain peculiar relations to God, relations which imply peculiar advantages and responsibilities. God is not the God of individuals only, he is also the God of "all the families of the earth."

The end for which the institution of the family was ordained was that God might secure "a godly seed," and this cannot be done if family worship be

neglected. It is not enough to have worship in the family; there must also be family worship. God is to be recognized by the family in its united capacity. The father as priest of the family is to pray with and for his children. Sometimes these priestly duties devolve upon the mother, and no altar is holier than the knees of a praying mother. In either case parenthood is never so exalted as when performing its priestly office within the charmed circle of the home.

The present-day decline in family worship is something to be accounted for. It is generally attributed to a decline in spiritual interest. But this is not always the case. In many instances it has come from an attempt to keep up forms, which in the rush of modern life call for modification and change. The habit of family worship will not be recovered until it is adapted to existing conditions. The long and leisurely and often dreary exercises of our forefathers are no longer suitable. What is needed is something brief and bright; the repeating it may be of a few favorite texts, and the lifting up of the heart in a few words of prayer—enough to enable the members of the family to stoop down and quaff a cupful of the water of life before rushing out into the fray. The simpler and more informal the exercises are, the better. In many instances it will be that or nothing. But let no one despise any method that maintains the religious unity of the home.

The family is the germ of the church. The ideal church is not an aggregation of individuals but of

families. The highly individualistic institution which at present stands for the body of Christ comes far short of the divine ideal. The ideal church is itself a large household, including smaller family groups, *within* which and *by* which God is worshiped.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL PRAYER

Prayer is, first of all, a personal act, founded upon personal relations existing between God and man; but it soon goes beyond that, and becomes a social act, not of the family only but of the larger social group, and finally of the entire Christian community. It is in this social form that it finds the fullness of its expression and the fullness of its power.

One thing which characterized the early followers of Jesus was their togetherness. They were drawn together, they worked together. The strongest cohesive power in their united life was prayer. When any one was converted, not only did he begin to pray but he joined himself to other praying souls; and thus through the working of the social principle the sacred fire was spread, and the life of the Spirit was kept burning within the heart of the church.

The institution which in the modern church takes us back to the fountain form of social worship is the prayer meeting. That perhaps comes nearer to the simple, free, and informal gatherings of the primitive church than anything to be found in the life of the church to-day. The prayer meeting has had an honorable history; it is connected with hallowed memories, and has been a source of spiritual power. In its present form it is comparatively

modern. That it is not an indispensable feature in the life of the church is shown from the fact that many churches have flourished without it. No matter how useful it has been in the past, if it has outlived its usefulness, it must go. Its past usefulness affords no justification for its present existence. Like every other institution, it must continue to justify its right to live.

That the old-fashioned prayer meeting has fallen upon evil days; that it has become moribund—having a name to live while it is dead—is in many instances sadly true. And in still more instances, while not exactly dead, it lives at a poor, dying rate, and is the least satisfactory feature in the life of the church. Its existence is perpetuated by a saving remnant, who support it from a sense of duty. And yet when some iconoclast advocates its abolishment the loudest outcry is often raised by those who do nothing to sustain it.

It used to be said that the prayer meeting of a church is the pulse of its piety, but that test is no longer a true one. In the ordinary church there is a great deal of piety that does not find expression through the prayer meeting. There are many earnest Christians to whom it has no spiritual value whatsoever. Nor do they suffer any compunctions of conscience for leaving it out of the circle of their interests. As it now exists it has lost to them all power of appeal.

Within many a church circle the question is raised, What shall we do with the prayer meeting?

Must it be given up, or set aside for something better? Shall we transform it into a social meeting, or into a meeting for Bible study, or into a meeting for the discussion of practical social questions? It is usually assumed that there is no use trying to continue the prayer meeting in its present form, and that it must be changed so as to be adapted to present-day conditions. Whether or not that be true, the mere change of methods will not go down to the root of the trouble. The fundamental need is a revival of the spirit of prayer. The church has too largely ceased to believe in prayer as necessary to the development of spiritual power. She has come to trust in outside things. She has been told that within the sphere of political action ballots are more effectual than prayers, and that the primary ought to be put before prayer meeting—with the result that the prayer meeting has been neglected.

To regain its place of power the prayer meeting must not only be brought into adjustment to new conditions—it must be reborn. When the breath of the Divine Spirit is breathed into the church it will be once more upon its knees. On foreign fields, where new chapters are added to the Acts of the Apostles, the prayer meeting reappears. And in the home churches it springs into new life in times of revival. When Spirit-led its atmosphere is changed, and however much its methods may be modified, it continues to be a prayer meeting. With the quickening of the life of the church the problem of the prayer meeting is solved.

CHAPTER IV.

PUBLIC PRAYER

THAT is, prayer as connected with public worship; or what has been called "common and open prayer," to distinguish it from private prayer.

In the religion of the Jews common and open prayer had a prominent place. The three sanctuaries in which Jewish worship was held, namely, the *proseuchæ,* the synagogue, and the temple, were all intimately associated with prayer. The *proseuchæ,* which was to be found in communities where the number of Jews was too small to support a regular synagogue, is described in Acts 16. 13, as "a place of prayer." It was in a humble *proseuchæ,* by a river's side, at the outskirts of the city of Philippi, where a few devout women had come together for prayer, that Gentile Christianity was born.

The synagogue was somewhat similar to the *proseuchæ;* indeed, some regard the two as identical. The most satisfactory explanation of the difference between them is that where the latter means a *place* of prayer the former means a *house* of prayer; that is to say, something of the same nature but larger and more highly developed.

In a still more emphatic sense, the expression "a house of prayer" is used as descriptive of the *temple.* Jesus said, "My house shall be called a house of

prayer for all nations." It was God's design that under its golden dome the representatives of all the nations should gather for prayer. In two other instances where the temple is mentioned it is connected with prayer. The first of these is when Peter and John went "up into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour" (Acts 3. 1)—the time of the morning sacrifice. The other instance is where it is said that "the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the hour of incense" as Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course" (Luke 1. 10). In connection with these two times of public worship prayer is especially mentioned as the prominent feature, and it is not without significance that on both occasions the exercise of prayer was connected with the offering of sacrifice, signifying that through sacrifice man makes his approach to God in prayer.

As was to be expected, the religion of Jesus, which grew out of the soil of Judaism, gives to prayer a place of preeminence in its worship. Calvin does not hesitate to affirm that "God declares that prayer is the chief part of his service." The church no less than the temple is to be known as the house of prayer. At first its services were very simple, and were impressive in their simplicity. They consisted of song and prayer, of words of testimony and exhortation. Justin Martyr, describing the worship of the early Christians, says, "They assembled on the Lord's Day, read memoirs of

Jesus, exhorted one another, and prayed." Speaking of the presiding minister, he says that he offered up prayer "as he was able," that is, according to the best of his ability; and the people responded by saying, "Amen."

In that day we find no trace whatever of a ritual or liturgy. The prayers were free and spontaneous, as became the prayers of those who had been anointed priests unto God, and who in the exercise of their priestly prerogatives had liberty of access unto God. Generally, they arose out of the occasions on which they were offered, and were strictly extemporaneous. Augustine reminds us that our Lord "did not teach his disciples what words they should use in prayer, but what things they should pray for." Instead of giving a ritual he created the impulse to pray, and then left each one free to express himself in the way most natural to him. Tertullian says of the early Christians that "they prayed without a monitor, because from the heart."

It was not until the close of the second century that the use of brief written prayers came to be adopted in connection with baptism. The Teaching of the Twelve gives some of these prayers, and says of them, "to which the prophet is not bound." Evidently, their use was optional. But a change gradually crept in, and the primitive condition in which the disciples came together to worship God in the freedom of the spirit was at length superseded by the use of prescribed forms. The adoption of these forms was "a sign of spiritual stagnation,"

and indicated a lapse into legalism. And ever since new forms have generally been added in times of religious decline; and many revivals of religion—notably those under George Fox, and John Wesley in England—have been attempts to break through the fetters of form and recover greater simplicity of worship. Not unfrequently has ritualism been twin sister to "rut-ualism."

It is not, however, the use of outward forms in religion that is condemned in the New Testament, but the making of religion a thing of *mere* form. External forms of some kind are necessary to religious expression. They are to religion what the body is to the soul. They hold up inward experience as the trellis holds up the vine. For the use of prescribed forms, within certain limits, there is much to be said, especially for the use of the noble liturgies in which the devotional life of great saints of the past are enshrined. That they have helped to nourish the spiritual life of the saintliest souls goes without the saying. That they have given dignity to the worship of the church is equally true. The prime objection to them is that they are the expression of the thoughts and feelings of other men. They are not our own, except in a secondary sense. Why our praying should be confined to the forms of other ages it is difficult to see. Has the church of to-day become so sterile that she cannot produce her own prayers? Has all creative power gone clean from her? If she needs to remint her doctrinal formulas, so as to adapt them to the ever-

changing conditions of thought and life, has she not equal need to remint the forms of her prayers?

When non-liturgical churches decline in spirituality, and the extemporaneous prayers of the pulpit become stale and commonplace, the remedy is frequently sought in what is called "the enrichment of the services," said enrichment consisting in the adoption of certain liturgic features, instead of the enrichment of the souls of the worshipers. These additions are not made because the life within is at the bursting point, and requires new vehicles of expression, but because it is at low ebb and needs fostering. They are a tacit confession that the spontaneous expression of religious feeling can no longer be relied upon, and that some external prop is therefore needed to hold up the tottering wall of the temple of prayer.

Touching the question of direct preparation for public prayer, there is much to be said on both sides. Premeditation, earnest brooding there ought to be. The prayer leader should cultivate a feeling for the people; he should think of them one by one; his mind should sweep the circle of their needs. But whether or not the preparation should extend to phrase-making is another matter. Some one has said, "You can write *about* God, but you cannot write *to* God." Prayer is a direct address to God, and not a literary composition, nor a mere rhetorical performance. A newspaper reporter once described the prayer of a noted divine as "the most eloquent prayer ever addressed to a Boston audi-

ence." It may safely be said of such prayer that it does not get higher than the roof.

If the value of prayer does not lie in its correct form, much less does it lie in the official position of the one who prays. It lies in the character of him who prays. Only when the heart is right before God does prayer avail. Hence the best preparation for prayer is the preparation of the heart. When a young preacher asked the venerable Dr. Alexander McLaren for counsel on the question of preparation for public prayer, he answered, "The best way to prepare your prayers is by preparing yourself." That was certainly sound advice. Cultivate a feeling for God, or what Eucken calls "a susceptibility of God"; bring yourself consciously into his presence; open the heart to him; keep the inward life clean and pure, and the fountain of prayer will flow freely; and although your prayer may come short in rhetorical finish, it will not lack in spiritual effectiveness.

Whether, therefore, prayer be liturgical or extemporaneous; whether it be spontaneous or premeditated; whether it be memorized or self-originated, the important thing is that it be real. It is reality that God seeks—"truth in the inward parts." We can pray "by rote as well as by book." The danger of formality belongs to every method. The argument of Paul regarding circumcision may be applied to prayer. Neither stately liturgies, nor free and informal prayer availeth anything, but a heart that is right with God; a heart that pierces

through the outward form of words and looks upon the face of God; a heart that cuts loose from surrounding things and fixes its thought, and trust, and hope on God alone.

CHAPTER V

PRAYER IN THE GREAT ASSEMBLIES OF THE CHURCH

In her Councils, Convocations, and Conferences, where the church has met to consider religious, missionary, and social questions, she has always been thrown back upon God. Unable to find fitting expression for her faith, or to remove the barriers which lie in the way to union; unable to meet the pressing demands of the rapidly enlarging fields of work; unable to cope with the forces of evil which were making for social ruin, she has been forced to make her appeal to heaven for help.

A study of the history of the great Councils, in the furnace heat of whose enthusiasm the creeds of the church were forged, and by whose deliberations the course of the church, in reference to things political and social was shaped, shows that formally, at least, all their discussions were begun, continued, and ended in prayer. In the tangle of perplexing problems, the direction of the Great Head of the church was eagerly sought. Controversial antagonists rested on their arms to invoke heaven's aid in the prosecution of their respective claims. And if they were sometimes more eager to have God on their side than to make sure of being on God's side,

still it was to God that they made their final appeal.

A striking modern instance of a great gathering being filled and swayed by the spirit of prayer is furnished by the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, at which the daily prayer meeting was the culminating point of interest and power. Who can imagine what might have happened had the proportion of time given to speaking and prayer been reversed. It is the profound conviction of John R. Mott that "the missionary leaders have not put prayer first," and he adds, "It is much less difficult to give to missions than to pray for them." Dr. Arthur H. Smith, the veteran missionary of China, declares that "the problem of foreign missions is how to use the buried talent of intercessory prayer." Shortly before his lamented death in the wreck of the Titanic, William T. Stead, when prevented from addressing a mass meeting of men in Liverpool, sent this message: "Tell the men of Liverpool there is no power like prayer. Twenty thousand praying men in Liverpool would revolutionize the world. Get your men to pray, and you will get them to live." Every crisis on the mission field, at home or abroad, has to be met by prayer; every advance is preceded by prayer. The great hopes of missionary conquest which now beat within the breast of the church can find their fulfillment only by prayer. To the end of time the church suppliant will be the church militant, and the church militant will be the church triumphant.

The call of the church to-day is for more money, more men, and more equipment, in order to push the work of the world's evangelization to success. What if God needs our prayers more than he does our money or our service? "Men planning for revivals," remarks Nolan Rice Best, "ask money and organization for bringing their plans to pass. God seeks only prayers. He can have a revival anywhere if he may but have enough prayers of the right kind to work with." Other things have their place in the world's conquest, but to prayer must the primacy be given. Yet Christian people will give money without stint to provide the necessary agencies for carrying on the work of the church while withholding prayer, which alone can make these agencies effective. They will throw themselves into the work of social betterment, and manifest a languid interest in the hidden life of prayer, by which the passion for social betterment is nourished and social activities made effective. The river of service runs bank-full, the river of prayer runs sluggish and low. Altar fires that once burned brightly have died down, and there are no arms of flame reaching up to heaven to receive the morning and evening sacrifice.

A few years ago the prophecy was made that we were on the eve of a revival which would consist in the consecration of the money power of the church. That revival has measurably come; and now may we look for a revival of prayer; a revival which will bring us back to a more complete dependence

upon spiritual forces? The victory is not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of God poured out in answer to prayer. A praying church will be a living church, a missionary church, a conquering church.

PART SIXTH
THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE CHRISTIANITY OF TO-DAY

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PRAYER is the weakest thing in the religious life of to-day. In recent years the church has been growing away from prayer. The prayer habit has been on the wane. There has been a wonderful increase in many forms of religious activity, and a corresponding decrease in the practice of prayer. The social life of the church has developed to such an extent that the supper room has been substituted for the "upper room." Prayer, when not dispensed with altogether, is crowded into a corner. For lack of prayer the spiritual life of the church languishes and her multiplied activities are ineffective for the highest spiritual results. To have her work vitalized she must needs pray more and better. There must be a stronger outbreaking of desire, a deeper inbreathing of life. Anything can be dispensed with rather than prayer. She can attain true success without wealth, without fine buildings, without crowds, but not without prayer. If her prayer life is feeble she may make a fair outward show, but can never come to the place of spiritual power which she ought to occupy.

How to regain the spirit and practice of prayer where they have been lost, how to create them where they have never existed, are, therefore, matters of

transcendent importance. How is this to be done? We answer: It is to be done by obtaining, in the first place, a clearer understanding of what prayer—and especially Christian prayer—means; and by obtaining also a more definite understanding of what it accomplishes. From a deeper knowledge of the nature of prayer, and a keener appreciation of the real and substantial benefits which it confers, a deeper interest in it will spring. Those who have the strongest convictions of its value pray most and best. Those who fail to realize its worth have no place for it among the interests of their lives.

One of the most important services which the Christian teacher of the present day can render is to recover faith in the potency of prayer. And this he can do only by bringing the entire subject of prayer into harmony with modern thought and life. Happily for such an effort, the pendulum is beginning to swing back toward a simple and rational faith on the reality and power of prayer, and signs already appear of the beginning of the revival of the life of prayer in the modern church under new and hopeful conditions.

1. *The Present-Day Movement toward a Deeper Spirituality Is Favorable to the Promotion of Prayer.*

The great mystical movement which we see breaking out in unexpected places is an effort to counteract the tendency to outwardness in religion. Many deeply spiritual natures, weary of the outward

routine of religious worship and work, are endeavoring to regain a sense of spiritual realities, and to drink from the deep wells of truth which traditional religion has choked up. Unfortunately, they have often been forced outside of the church for what they ought to have been able to find within it. To their starved souls the modern religious cults make their appeal, for, with all their vagaries and excesses, these cults emphasize the spiritual side of religion. When religion becomes mechanical and automatic rather than free and vital it ceases to be satisfying. When work takes the place of worship, when philanthropy takes the place of prayer; when speaking to one another takes the place of speaking to God; when the paying church member is set above the praying church member, grievous consequences follow.

To give to this upward movement toward the things of the Spirit practical direction it must be connected with the development of the life of prayer. A new *thought* movement, a movement which is upon a purely intellectual plane, must ultimately become spiritually sterile. Man does not live by thought alone. He is not satisfied with knowing *about* God; what his hungry heart craves is the consciousness of his presence, the sense of his inward, personal touch. And how can this be gained except by prayer? Into the life of prayer many are dumbly waiting to be directed. Their *hearts* rather than their lips are asking, "Teach us to pray." They have a secret conviction that their

deepest needs will not be met if they are taught merely to think and to work. They are ready and anxious to become scholars in the school of prayer, that they may learn how to come into contact with the hidden springs of spiritual life and power, whose source is in the heart of the Eternal God.

And here is the present-day opportunity of the church—to teach men to pray, and not merely to teach them what they ought to know about prayer. Hitherto her energies have been bent to the production of better workers, the need is upon her to bend her energies to the production of better prayers. Only by doing this can she gain and keep her rightful place of spiritual leadership within this unfolding movement into which many of the noblest souls are being swept, and by which they are being carried to ends of which they little dream.

2. The Reaction from the Present-Day Materialistic Drift, Which Is Already Setting in, Will Bring a Revival of the Spirit and Life of Prayer.

We live in an age of material progress and achievement, an age in which the realities of the unseen world are looked upon as shadowy and unsubstantial. But a change is inevitable. It is already in the air. Man is a spiritual being, and is, as Sabatier has said, "incurably religious." He has wants which none but God can satisfy, and sooner or later the hunger of his heart will bring him to his knees. However deeply he may be immersed in worldly pursuits, he must come to the surface for

air. His highest aspirations may be crushed down and smothered up, but they cannot be altogether extinguished. Man is too big to be forever satisfied with material things or with the attainment of material ends. He has clamorous spiritual appetites which nothing earthly can still. His eternal soul can be satisfied only in the Eternal God. There are times when the stiffest knee must bend; times when the most earth-bound soul will look up; times when

> Lips cry, "God be merciful,"
> That ne'er said, "God be praised";

times when every man will turn from the tending of his flock and stand with bared head and hushed heart before the burning bush, listening to the voice of God.

It matters not how man has got his spiritual nature; that he *has* got it is the significant fact. He has a sense of kinship with the Eternal. He feels that he belongs to the spiritual sphere of things; and that he lives in a universe in which all things exist for spiritual ends. The ultimate realities upon which he plants the feet of his soul he finds in the realm of spirit. In his highest mood he sees himself as a spiritual being living in the heart of a spiritual universe.

Into the place providentially prepared for it by this new conception of things the whole question of prayer is now waiting to be brought. If for a time materializing influences proved inimical to the development of the spirit of prayer, the spiritualizing

influences already at work are turning the tide in its favor. The recognition of the spiritual meaning of life is in itself a call to prayer. When men see that temporal interests are not paramount; when they begin to hunger for the finer things of the spirit; when they seek to overcome the downward pull of their earthly environment, and keep the spirit on the top, they are invariably drawn to God in prayer. There is something within them that tells them that the highest welfare of their spiritual nature demands that they come into vital relation with him in order that they may receive his proffered help in their attempts to rise. As soon as that higher relationship is established the downward bent is changed, and the soul begins to soar. It seeks the things which are above, as fire ascending seeks the sun. And in proportion as it keeps itself open to God the more does it experience his upholding, uplifting power.

3. *The Enlarging Vision and Scope of Life Is a Call to Prayer.*

We live in a new world—a very different world from that in which our fathers lived. We have a wider horizon; life has become more varied, more complex—whether it has become more satisfying is another matter. To this changed condition the whole circle of prayer thought and life requires to be readjusted. The enlargement of life, together with its increased complexity and perplexity, makes an increased demand on prayer. Never was a life

of prayer more difficult, and never was it more needful.

Increase is the law of life. Never did life count for more than it does to-day; and to-morrow will be better still. Now, prayer instead of running athwart this enlarging of life helps it on. It is one of the ways in which our spiritual possessions come to us; it is a prime condition of all growth in knowledge and in grace. The man who prays lives in a larger world, and is himself a larger man. His spiritual value is increased. His life is filled with new possibilities; it has a deeper meaning, a larger scope. With expansion of heart there comes to him augmentation of power. With broadening of vision there comes the ability to live and labor in line with the growing life of the times and with the growing purpose of God. Entering into God's thought, catching God's view of the things going on around him, he tries to keep step with the onward movement of God in the world's life. To him things are bigger than they seem. The walls of time break away and let the eternal glories in, and the world of sense is invaded by the life of heaven; all things, seen and unseen, present and to come, work for redemption; and while earth yields her utmost, heaven holds in reserve an uncountable overplus.

4. *The Modern Scientific Spirit Is Bringing Reenforcement to the Spirit of Devotion.*

In the not far distant past the scientific spirit

was critical, analytic, and destructive. It dug at the roots of things. It stirred up questionings, which was good; and it led to misgivings about things essential, which was not good. In the disturbed atmosphere which it created it was difficult to pray. Along with the intellectual unrest and lack of certainty there was an absence of that childlike spirit to which the things of the spiritual kingdom are revealed, and which is an essential element in true prayer.

But a reaction is setting in; the constructive method is taking place of the critical and destructive; there is a deeper spirit of reverence, a franker recognition of the fact that there is another realm lying outside the world of sense; that man has a right to go on "believing what he cannot prove," and that with regard to some things his soul has a right to be heard. Faith in the supernatural has stood the test of time, and has become purer and stronger for the fiery ordeal through which it has passed. And one of the results of its victory—a result which the coming days will more confidently declare—is the growth of a profounder sense of the value of prayer.

Prayer itself is also being put upon a more scientific basis by being taken out of its provincial setting and related to the conception of God and the universe which science has made possible. The natural world is not a closed but an "open system." It is open to God, plastic to his touch. So is also the world of mind. Psychical research gives hints

of a subtle law, to which the name of telepathy has been given, by which mind acts upon mind from a distance. It would perhaps be putting the matter too strongly to speak of telepathy as an established scientific fact; it is, however, a feasible hypothesis, in behalf of which there is a strong presumptive proof. The conviction prevails and grows that we can project our thoughts into the minds of others, and that they in turn can transfer their thoughts to us. An analogy of the free passage of thought from mind to mind is furnished by wireless telegraphy. There is no longer any limit set to the transmission of thought by this means. The boundaries of space are melting away and the world is becoming a vast whispering gallery. That thought should be thus transmitted to earth's remotest bound is scarcely less wonderful than that prayer should rise to heaven and reach the heart of the Infinite Father. For what is prayer but—

> A breath that floats beyond the iron world,
> And touches Him who made it?

What is it but a spirit-voice projected into space, which travels on and on until it finds a response in the Infinite Heart, to which it is attuned?

It ought not to be as difficult as it once was to believe in these larger aspects of prayer, the whole world of human kind having become so knit together that one mind can reach another almost anywhere. The modes of access to others which God has left open to the praying soul we may never

fully know. The important thing, however, is not the knowledge of the modes but the fact itself. And the fact is enhanced in value when an ever-widening reach and closer touch is seen to be in harmony with the laws of mind and with established scientific principles.

5. *The New Psychology Is Preparing the Way for a Better Understanding of Prayer.*

Looked at from the standpoint of the psychologist, prayer is a spiritual fact and experience, rooted in the nature of man, and forming an important part of his inner life. As one of the most pronounced facts of consciousness it forms a legitimate object of study. Psychologists of every shade admit its reality, while differing as to its nature and value.

"Prayer," says Eucken, "reveals the naked soul." Never does man uncover himself more completely than when he prays. If we look in upon him at this time of unveiling, what do we find? What are the contents of his consciousness? What is he doing, and what does he know himself to be doing? In other words, what are the psychicological elements in the spiritual exercise called prayer? The answer to this question must at best be only partial; but even a superficial study of the psychology of prayer will reveal, at least, the following elements:

(1) *The consciousness of personality.* Prayer is the outcome of personality. It comes from the depths of the spiritual nature. The subconscious

mind, with its stored-up memories, impressions, and experiences, is the fountain from which the stream of devotion is fed; but it is in the conscious mind that prayer is actualized. When a man prays his whole nature is consciously engaged in the act.

Prayer is the conscious moving out and moving up of the soul to God; it is the meeting of two self-conscious persons and the establishing of intercourse between them. Its beginning is contemporaneous with man's moral awakening; and man's moral awakening is contemporaneous with the touch of God upon the soul, whether that touch comes from the sense of God's displeasure on account of sin, or from a sense of his brooding love; and whether it is experienced when man is wandering in the desert, seeking rest to his troubled soul, or nestling in the Father's arms.

(2) *Freedom of action.* Prayer is a free, and hence a moral act. "It is," as Schlatter has put it, "the act by which we turn our will upon God." In its crudest and most instinctive form it may be the mere outcry of a soul in trouble, the cry of a wounded animal; but when a man *really* prays he does so because he wants to pray, not because he must. He follows out an impulse which he has power to crush; he renders a definite act of homage which he has power to withhold. It is of his own free initiative that he sends his soul into the invisible, that it may hold communion with the source of its life. Because it is free, prayer is something which we are enjoined to render; to restrain it is

to rob God; to offer it up under pressure is to make it the refuge of a coward rather than the offering of a pious heart. To be real and acceptable it must be a free-will offering.

(3) *The forthputting of effort.* Prayer is a condition of activity rather than of passivity. It is a form of self-action. It calls for attention; for the curbing of wandering thoughts, the fixing of the mind by a definite effort of the will upon a given object, the holding of the mind in a waiting, expectant attitude. The Mystics delighted in representing the soul as a garden watered by prayer. Saint Teresa elaborates this metaphor, and speaks of four ways in which this is done—by drawing from a well, by a water wheel, by causing a stream to flow through it, or by rain from heaven. These stages represent different degrees of passivity, the goal being reached when the soul lies open to God as a plowed field to the rain. But this representation does not cover the case. The metaphor is overstrained. There may be passive waiting, but there cannot be passive praying. Prayer always calls for effort, sometimes for strenuous effort. The soul does not naturally lie open to God as a plowed field to the rain; it opens itself to him by conscious effort; it does not merely allow the rain to soak in, it actively absorbs it. To pray truly is never an easy thing; it takes a resolute act of the will to stir oneself up to lay hold on God, and it takes sustained effort of the will to continue undistractedly in the exercise of prayer.

(4) *The awakening of desire.* It is interesting to watch the birth and growth and decay of desire as it expresses itself in prayer. Sometimes it wells up spontaneously from the depths of the heart, expressing itself in a vague yearning after higher things; sometimes it is languid; sometimes, aroused by outward stimuli, it arises to the highest pitch of emotional fervency. However produced, it is the stuff out of which prayers are made.

Looked at on its deeper side, it is a self-kindled fire, burning within the breast, and fanned into a flame by the power of self-excitation. It has its origin in man's nature and needs. As a creature of needs man is a creature of desires. His desires change as his needs change, and his needs change as he changes. Now, it is of the nature of prayer not only to furnish vent for desire but to purify and ennoble it. In the awful Presence to which prayer ascends every selfish and sinful desire is withered up; and every low and unworthy desire is elevated and brought into harmony with the Sovereign Will.

(5) *The calling into play of the imagination.* There is a whole set of mental images, of which prayer makes constant use, founded upon the relation existing between the human and the divine. God is by turn a Father, a King, a Shepherd, a Husband, a Friend, a Guardian, a Guide, a Saviour, and many things besides. These various figures under which he is represented appeal to the poetical element in human nature; they call for some per-

sonalizing of the Infinite; some picturing to the imagination of the One to whom prayer is directed. No one can pray to "a principle," and even if the brooding presence be regarded as formless, it must needs be focalized and personalized to the imagination, so as to mean something living, real, and responsive.

But the chief mental image of God, and the one that helps us most in prayer, is that provided in Him who is "the image of the invisible God." When we think of God we think of him as like Jesus; and when we think of Jesus we have before our mind's eye a picture of embodied moral perfection, which imagination constructs out of the scanty materials furnished in the fragmentary records of his life. And what, although, as Dr. David Smith has said, "One's mental image of Jesus is only a dream-face," it is this "dream-face" which gives to many the only tangible conception of God obtainable when they seek to find a realizing sense of his presence.

When prayer is offered for others there is also brought into play what may be called the sympathetic imagination. The image of the one prayed for is called up. We see him before us; we enter into his life; we endeavor to see things as he sees them, and interpret in our prayer what is most urgent within the circle of his needs. In this way the man who prays is lifted out of the prosaic world around him. He becomes an idealist. Things which eye hath not seen nor ear heard are revealed

to him. He lives in the invisible realm where spirit meets with spirit, and where wondrous things are done which were never dreamed of in our philosophies.

(6) *A craving for self-expression.* Prayer is one of the ways in which the soul-life is expressed. "It is the putting forth of vital energy. It is the highest effort of which the human spirit is capable" (J. R. Mott). We express ourselves to God in prayer, "as the universe expresses God to us." We seek to let him know what we think and feel. This we do by vocal utterance; but vocal utterance is never an isolated and unrelated act in the life of a religious man; it is, rather, a passing act in which his whole life is involved, and in which his whole life is temporarily expressed. Prayer is conterminous with life. It is the whole life that prays. Hence a man's prayer will go up or down to the level of his life. As he thinks in his heart so will he pray. In his prayers all that is inmost in his life will be expressed. But fullness of expression in prayer can never be realized when prayer is individualistic. The highest prayer has its roots in man's social nature, and comes from the working of an altruistic spirit that demands social expression. When anyone becomes absorbed in himself the stream of prayer soon dries up; when his interests reach out beyond himself "his thoughts of others gradually become prayers" (Forbes Robinson). In view of these facts, it is passing strange that the place of prayer in the solution of the social problem should

have been so largely overlooked. Yet it touches the core of the whole matter. Apart from its power as a working force in the world's life, it creates a new consciousness of social values, and awakens sentiments which ultimately find expression in the relations of society. Never is man's social consciousness more keenly alive, and never is he brought into closer sympathy with the social problem around him than when he prays for others. The more he prays for them the more intensive grows his love for them, and the stronger grows his desire to help them.

These suggestions concerning the psychology of prayer touch only the fringe of the subject. There is much in psychology which prayer does not take into account; for it has to do with what comes within the range of observation, and knows nothing of unseen forces. That consciousness of the divine fellowship, which is the deepest thing in prayer and with which the prayer begins and ends, is beyond its ken. What the psychologist sees is a soul attempting to rise, like a bird with a broken wing, and often falling earthward; what he does not see is a soul which has found a resting place, where no mortal eye can follow it, in the bosom of the Eternal Father.

6. *The Trend of Modern Thought Is Throwing Light upon the Relation of Prayer to Law.*

One of the most common objections to prayer has been its seeming opposition to the uniformity of the natural order. It has been boldly asserted that there

is no place for prayer in a world in which everything is held in the grip of universal law, and that it can have no possible effect in altering the unalterable. This objection is based upon the assumption that God is limited by the things which he has created; that his laws are fetters by which he is bound rather than methods by which he works—his masters rather than his servants. What we call the laws of nature are simply the orderly sequences of events. They are not entities separate from God, but are the expression of his mind and will. Being under his control, they can be changed and modified by him as he pleases. If within the cosmic order room has been left for human freedom so that, as Brierley has said, "we move freely in a bound universe," surely there is room also for divine freedom. It is a daring thing to put limits to what God can do.

By connecting prayer with law, and relating it to the existing order within which God's providence operates, we make it believable; by divorcing it from the natural processes of life, and associating it with the unwonted and the spectacular we put a stumbling-block in the way of its acceptance. Not that the possibility of direct intervention is to be excluded; not that God cannot, if he chooses, alter the course of events to bring about a certain result; but it is more in accordance with what we know of his ways to expect that the answer to prayer should be found in the common rather than the extraordinary; in the everyday happenings of human life rather than in marked interferences and interposi-

tions. Where, therefore, nothing wonderful takes place, we are not to conclude that prayer has not been answered. As a rule, God's answer is not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in "the still small voice."

Since the world is governed in the interests of all God's children, it is not seemly or right for any one of them to claim a monopoly of his favor, and ask him to change his arrangements to meet his individual desires and needs. Upon this point Dr. G. Campbell Morgan has the following suggestive story: A thoughtful boy, when his mother prayed for good weather for a picnic, said: "Mother, I don't think you ought to ask God for a good day. Perhaps it would be a great deal better for the farmers to have it wet, and why should it be fine just for our outing? Why don't you rather ask God to help you choose one of his fine days?" This in a nutshell is the philosophy of prayer for weather, and for prayer for temporal things in general. The end of all such praying is not to get God to adjust things to our desires, but to bring ourselves into adjustment with his plans; it is not to alter God's laws, but to bring ourselves into harmony with them. By prayer we enter into the will of God, and accept it without murmuring or disputing.

An enlarged vision of divine activity within the sphere of law would make many things which we have been accustomed to call miracles appear divine commonplaces. Nothing that does not imply a contradiction is too great for God. And when we see

how man's power has widened within the limits of law; when we see how things are done by him which a hundred years ago would have been deemed impossible, we dare not limit God's power in any direction, nor imagine that there can ever be a circumstance in which he cannot send relief to his praying child.

As the relation of prayer to law comes to be better understood, nature is seen to be accessible to spiritual forces. It is ruled from above. "In the upper region God works upon the lower." By prayer man brings the resources of heaven down to earth. He taps the fountain of living energy, and brings its life-giving waters into the desert; he "opens a sluice between the great ocean, and our little earthly channels, when the great sea gathers itself together and flows in at full tide."

The world is controlled by spiritual forces *for spiritual ends*. Behind unchanging law is unchanging love, and if law works out its ends so does love. Once admit that a loving Father rules above and operates all the forces of nature for the good of his children, and it will no longer seem strange that he should, if he pleases, so modify and alter things as to secure the end upon which his heart is set. Upon such an assumption the philosophy of prayer must ultimately rest. Professor Tyndall saw this when, speaking as a scientist, he remarked: "It is a matter of experience that an earthly father, who is at the same time wise and tender, listens to the requests of his children, and if they do not ask

amiss, takes pleasure in granting their requests. We know also that this compliance extends to the alteration, within certain limits, of the current of events on earth. With this suggestion offered to experience, it is no departure from the scientific method to place behind natural phenomena a universal Father, who, in answer to the prayers of his children, alters the currents of their phenomena." And seeing our Father knoweth what things we need before we ask him, that he always desires to bless us, the object of prayer is not to change his mind, but to get into his thought and sweetly accept his good and perfect will in all things. When this is reached and we are brought into oneness with the divine purpose of grace by which our lives and the lives of others are encompassed, the true end of prayer has been attained.

7. A Clearer Recognition of the Rationale of Prayer Is Putting It upon a Firmer Footing.

Prayer is coming more and more to be looked upon as a rational act, not a mere impulse of the affections, but also a dictate of reason, or, as Wordsworth has it, "a rational prerogative." When we pray truly we follow the lead of our reason as well as of our heart. Paul did this when in the midst of a wild storm of fanaticism within the church at Corinth, as men prayed in an unknown tongue, he stood unperturbed, refusing to surrender his mental integrity or to abdicate his reason, affirming, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the

understanding also" (1 Cor. 14. 15). This is the proper attitude to maintain; and we pay God a poor compliment if in any way whatever we oppose prayer to rationality.

Looked at in the light of human analogy, prayer is a natural and rational way of securing certain ends. We ask and receive from one another. We give special favors one to another in answer to special requests. Is it therefore strange that the same rule should obtain in our dealings with God? And, anyway, what have we to guide us to an understanding of prayer save these human analogies? Man is a creature of numberless wants; God is the source of boundless supplies. Prayer is the appeal of the insufficient to the All Sufficient. It is founded upon that sense of dependence upon a higher power out of which all religion has sprung, and is the most natural and rational thing in the world.

Men of all creeds, and of no creeds, have in times of emergency sought the help of heaven. General Kodama, who was the directing power in the Japanese army in the war with Russia, was accustomed to retire for about an hour every morning, after rising, for prayer. Questioned as to why he did so, he replied, "When a man has done everything in his power there remains nothing but the help of the gods." And Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said: "I have been driven many times to my knees by the conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of

all around me, seemed insufficient for the day." No man is always sufficient unto himself. His utmost effort will avail nothing unless he links himself up with God. When baffled, where can he turn for light but to the All-Wise? When broken on the wheel of adversity, where can he look for help but to the All-Mighty? The cutting away of earthly props; the toppling over of the most fondly cherished schemes; the experience of the utter inadequacy of all other sources of help, throws a man back upon God. In his helplessness he calls upon him as instinctively as a child awakening in the dark calls for his mother; and doing so he finds that

> There is more wisdom in a whispered prayer
> Than in all the ancient lore of all the schools,

and that "the soul upon its knees holds God by the hand" and lives the darkness through, peacefully awaiting the dawning of the morning.

Between divine supply and human need there is a beautiful correlation. Over against every legitimate want there is abundant provision. But among the things which God has provided for his children, and which he is anxious that they possess, are some which he cannot give unless they pray for them. He may shower outward blessings *upon* them without their asking, he can pour the gifts of the spirit *into* them only when their hearts are opened to receive them.

Nor is it necessary that they understand the rationale of prayer. Within themselves they may

have the witness that it is a good thing, while unable to understand its workings; and may be supremely satisfied with it so long as it harmonizes with their nature and meets in the most natural ways their deepest needs.

8. *The Ability of Prayer to Stand the Pragmatic Test Is Winning Back the Faith of Many.*

The question of pragmatism—"Does it work?"—is one by which every doctrine and theory must ultimately be tested. That prayer "works" is borne out by the testimony of Christian consciousness. It is the theorist alone who doubts its reality and efficacy. Those who pray most are most assured of its practical utility. They are not found asking, "What profit shall there be if we pray unto the Almighty?" They know in themselves, they know from what their ears have heard, and their eyes have seen, that it pays. Nor does their faith stand alone. Successive generations of saints joyfully testify that it has accomplished definite results in their own lives, and in the lives of those for whom they have prayed.

First of all, then, prayer works in experience. It brings to the one who employs it present returns. These returns are none the less real and valid because they are mainly within the spiritual sphere of things. Evidence regarding the benefits to be derived from prayer within the material sphere is not always forthcoming, for the good reason that God subordinates the material to the spiritual, and

instead of being chiefly "meat purveyor," he is the giver of abundant life. There are things which he values more than immunity from outward ills; and yet this is the thing for which people generally pray, and by which they test the validity of prayer. In applying the pragmatic test to prayer we have to consider its chief end. If that end is gained, it is a success; if it is lost, it is a failure. But whatever doubts may be had touching the direct answer to specific petitions, the reflex influence of prayer cannot be questioned. It avails within the person who prays, bringing upon his parched heart the dew of heaven, and undergirding him with strength for the battle of life. Yet prayer is never *merely* reflex. In answer to prayer God does something; he imparts some substantial benefit. A saying like that of George Meredith, "He who prays rises from prayer a better man," has no meaning unless God, in answer to his prayer, *makes* the man who prays to him a better man. So certain is this ethical result that some one has said, "Leave off praying to God; for either praying will make you leave off sinning, or continuing in sin will make you desist from praying." Prayer not only sets the human will against sin, it also opposes divine power to the power of sin. But the reenforcement which it brings through the immediate action of God upon the soul, evil suggestion is repelled, the onrush of the powers of darkness is overcome, the hidden springs of motive are purified, drooping courage is revived, faith is strengthened, and the heart of wax

becomes the heart of oak. There is no possible condition in which prayer cannot bring needed help to the soul.

> Are you discouraged? Pray. It will comfort you.
> Are you peaceful? Pray. It will confirm you.
> Are you tempted? Pray. It will uphold you.
> Are you fallen? Pray. It will uplift you.

It is a matter of common experience and observation that all spiritual quickening and decline begin in the prayer closet. Fraser of Brea is the mouthpiece of every Christian when he confesses, "I find myself better or worse as I decay or decrease in prayer." When hearts are cold, and the lips of prayer are dumb, the life of the spirit languishes, but when closeness of walk with God is maintained, the humblest saint is lifted up into the Eternal and his commonplace life is glorified. But prayer has more than a "culture value." In the more strenuous aspects of life, when fierce conflicts have to be met, the power of prayer is equally potent. We go down in defeat when we neglect to pray; we conquer by prayer. Spurgeon pithily remarks, "Soldiers fight best upon their knees. The praying legion is the thundering legion, and chases the enemy before it." John Knox was a preacher mighty in the Word, but Mary Queen of Scots discerned the real secret of his power when she said that she feared his prayers more than all the armies of Europe. Martin Luther shook the world with the blow of his hammer when he nailed his famous thesis to the door of the

church at Wittenberg, but the historian who affirmed that "in his prayer-closet the Reformation was born" traced his power to the fountainhead. David Livingstone, dying upon his knees in a lonely hut in the heart of Africa, committing the cause which had consumed his life to God, and praying that the open sore of African slavery might be healed, reveals the secret of his power. Who knows but more was accomplished by his prayers in bringing about the absolution of African slavery than by his heroic and toilsome labors? But why multiply cases? The whole history of the church abundantly shows that men of power in the service of the kingdom have invariably been men of prayer.

The value of prayer as a distinct form of social energy, working for human redemption has also to be recognized. It has a place to fill and a work to do for which no substitute can be found. By it men influence one another for good; by it the Kingdom is brought in. When the church ceases to pray she ceases to conquer, and when her prayer-life is revived the whole aspect of things is changed, and she rises from the dust clad in the beautiful garments of salvation. From her a new power goes forth by which stony hearts are melted to contrition, the lives of notorious sinners transformed, and the onflowing tide of social iniquity turned back. This change may not always come in the way in which it was expected; it may come as the silent dew when it was expected to come as a downpouring rain; it may come as a gentle zephyr when it was expected

to come as a mighty rushing wind; it may come as "a voice of gentle stillness" when it was expected to come as a thunderbolt rending the rocks to pieces. But in whatever way it comes, it is a re-creating power, changing the landscape of life so that "instead of the thorn there comes up the fir tree; and instead of the brier there comes up the myrtle tree," and within the circle with which it operates everything is remade.

Thus we see that in the entire circle of human life prayer works. In the inward life of the spirit it has substantial results to show. By it great things are accomplished in the larger life of the world. It establishes new conditions, releases new forces, secures new blessings; it provides new channels through which God's saving grace can pour itself into the souls of men; it helps God to bring about the things for which he is ceaselessly working; it enables God to bear new witness to himself and it enables man to bear new witness to God. Those who put it to the test have all doubts touching its efficiency set to rest, and we are ever ready to exclaim with wonder and gratitude, "Behold what prayer has wrought!"

At the present hour, when Europe is in the convulsions of war, and the nations are being brought before the judgment seat of Christ, prayer is being put to the pragmatic test as perhaps never before. Out of the depths men are crying mightily to God. Whatever objections they may have had, philosophical or scientific, touching the efficacy of prayer,

have all melted away in the fire of a devastating judgment. They have been driven back to God. Their deep-flowing instincts have swept away all refuges of lies; the needs of the heart and the life have silenced the sophistries of the brain. No longer do they think of God as imprisoned within his laws, and as impotent to help; but as an Almighty Father whose ear is open to the cry of his sorely stricken children, and who is able to bring them relief. Hence, with one consent they are bowing at his feet.

But here lies the difficulty in the present situation. The nations engaged in mortal conflict are Christian nations; they are praying to the same God, and they are praying for the same thing. But it is all too evident that they are not always praying in the Christian way and in the Christian spirit. Sometimes they are praying to the Father of all as if he were a tribal god, and are putting in a claim to the monopoly of his favor as if they were his special favorites. Professedly they are praying in the name of Christ, while praying neither as he taught his disciples to pray nor as he himself prayed. Alas, much of the prayer offered up by the warring Christian nations is not Christian! It is vainglorious, selfish, revengeful, unloving. It is prayer *against* their brother men, instead of *for* them. That such prayer will return void to those who offer it up does not admit of question. But any nation that is truly Christian in its praying; any nation that bows before God in a spirit of humility; that prays for a blessing upon its foes; that prays for victory

to the right; for the actualizing of brotherhood; for the prevalence of righteousness; for the enthronement of love; and for the coming of the Father's Kingdom, will be heard. Its prayer, being begotten of the Spirit of Christ, being in accordance with prophecy and promise, and being in harmony with God's unfolding purpose of grace, cannot fail of ultimate fulfillment.

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